FRENCH PERSPECTIVES

BY

Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant

The Riverside Press Cambridge

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Signs of the Times
The Merciers at Topsbridge

HELEN

BY

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French Perspectives

FRENCH PERSPECTIVES

BY

Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant

Boston and New York
Houghton Mifflin Company
The Riverside Press Cambridge
1916

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PREFACE

It was nearly two years before the beginning of the war that a disquieting symbol of change first appeared to me in the French sky. I was sitting in a friendly garden, basking in the warm autumnal sunshine, savoring, as a New Englander can, the charm of being again in France. Above me, a red-roofed cottage; below, a steep, terraced hillside; beyond, closing the ripe green valley, a darkly wooded horizon. No sign of life but a solitary pony-cart climbing the one white road that cut the opposite hill. No sound in the golden air but the scratch of a pen at an upper window, the click of garden shears among the rose-bushes. Then suddenly, brusquely, an ominous whirr, a mysterious pulsing throb directly overhead. Staring up, I saw the long brown shadow of an army biplane sharp against the opalescent sky. Almost grazing the cottage roof, it wheeled, swooped across the valley, and disappeared. But the spell was broken. Those mechanical wings had left a sinister echo in the quiet garden; and

when my radical friend came down from his study to talk of aviation fields beyond the hill, of a journey he had just taken to the battlefields of 1870, I became aware of a new tension, a half-concealed anxiety, a subtle change in the French temper.

This change, as I saw it further reflected in a certain distinguished French household the following winter, I have tried to suggest in one of the last sketches in the present volume, "Signs of the Times." The Epilogue, "The Merciers at Topsbridge," will indicate that of the war itself I have had only a transatlantic impression. Most of the papers were written in days that now seem unbelievably felicitous, the occasional record of a series of peaceful French visits which date back to 1904.

My excuse for collecting them in war-time is precisely that the cross-sections of French life and character they seek to portray, the sober perspectives they would open, belong to the old France, not to the new. For I cannot see France as reborn, by a sort of miraculous conversion, from the ruins of the Variétés and the Latin Quarter. I see her rather as living through these bitter years on the strength of her ancient everyday virtues. Most of all, by force of what has been

called her "professional conscience," that love of work for work's sake, that passion for technical perfection, that scrupulous patience in carrying things through which, whether it takes the form of good housekeeping, tilling a field, writing a verse, making an artificial flower, or firing a big gun, is, I long ago came to believe, the deepest source of the French national energy.

"He who goes hungry without complaining, who walks with bloody feet, only fires after taking aim, and only dies if necessary, is the soldier who has only done his job perfectly," writes M. Pierre Hamp in his admirable *brochure*, "Le Travail Invincible." "You can't die but once," says the peasant woman, bringing in the harvest while shells shriek overhead; "*s'il n'y a que ça, c'est peu de misère.*" "*C'est la guerre,*" says the old miller of the north, sheltering the flame of his little stove behind his shattered wall, "but I must do my job — *il faut faire son mêtier.*" With the intellectual the expression is different, the spirit the same. "*Il faut tenir, tenir et lutter, n'est-ce pas?*" Hold on, struggle, those are the words the letters bring. "One can but turn back on one's self, try to draw from some inner reservoir all possible energy and force." It is only the young soldiers who speak of

heroism, and how temperate even their speech! "*L'héroïsme,*" wrote one of them to his mother the night before he died, "*ce n'est pas autre chose que ce qu'on est au fond, mais qui s'éclaire dans la clarté d'une incendie.*"

The brightness of the conflagration has revealed in extraordinary situations the people described in this book. For they are real people, though only in the case of public personages called by their real names. Mme. Ravignac, the good housekeeper, has organized and directed a large military hospital. Marie-Constance, the little modiste, whose delicate fingers loved the touch of velvet, is making soldiers' shirts. In the vaulted halls of the Abbey where Cenobites, ancient and modern, used to walk, wounded *poilus* are lying. The *Unanimiste* poets are meeting the "group-soul" of the nation at the front. These friends, and many others, — poets, writers, professors, painters, now strangely turned shoe-manufacturers, gunners, interpreters, stretcher-bearers, — are by their spontaneous sacrifice justifying my deepest faith and saving their country for the world.

What they are doing is only one more revelation of the France which will ever stand for me

as "*quelque chose à part dans le monde,*" a large leaven for the human spirit, —

> "An orb of nations, radiating food
> For body and for mind alway."

CHOCORUA, NEW HAMPSHIRE
July 1916

CONTENTS

I. CURIOUS COMPANY 1

II. STANDARDS OF A BOURGEOIS FAMILY 28

III. MIMI UP TO DATE 63

IV. THE OTHER SIDE OF THE DOOR 94

V. UTOPIA 117

VI. A PEASANT HERO OF PROVENCE 129

VII. M. LE CURÉ'S LUNCH-PARTY 151

VIII. ACHILLE 170

IX. NEW VOICES IN FRENCH POETRY 182

X. A MODERN CŒNOBIUM 197

XI. SIGNS OF THE TIMES 215

EPILOGUE

THE MERCIERS IN TOPSBRIDGE 231

Thanks are due to the editors of *Scribner's Magazine*, *The Outlook*, and *The New Republic* for permission to reprint several of the papers in this volume.

LETTERS FROM FRANCE

TRANSLATED BY H. M. C.

Those who have marveled at the courage and tenacity of France will better understand its sources after reading these letters of a Frenchwoman to a friend in this country, with their graphic pictures of war-time life, their illuminating anecdotes of the trenches heard at the bedsides of wounded soldiers, and their revelation of the indomitable spirit with which Frenchmen and Frenchwomen have met the present crisis.

$1.00 net at all bookstores, or from the publishers.

These letters are printed in the interest of the Orphelinat des Armées. The writer is working in all her spare moments among the refugees, and if any one who reads this little book shall feel inclined to contribute towards the support of the orphan children of France, it will be greatly appreciated by author and translator. Subscriptions may be sent to the publishers.

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French Perspectives

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Curious Company

"*Un, deux, trois, quatre — one,* two, three, four," chanted the doctor, with a strong accent on the first beat to emphasize the rhythm. "Slowly, slowly, M. l'Abbé, dragging the feet, bending the knees: *one,* two, three, four, that 's right. We 'll soon have you doing forty miles without stopping, like the Indian messengers from whom I learned my secret. Look, who is that, Mademoiselle?" he interrupted his lesson to his latest recruit, a young abbé, to ask me over his shoulder. Our band of runners, gesticulating and philosophizing as usual, had emerged from one of the sheltered paths, just opposite the main building of the Sanitarium, to the obviously amazed and diverted interest of a lady who stood on the steps. She was tall and red-haired, and the distinction of her bearing and the flash of her smile immediately aroused Dr. Arnauld's keen human curiosity.

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"She must be a new patient," I answered, "but she has a familiar look. Oh, yes, I remember! She was at that sanitarium in Auteuil, where I was sent immediately after my accident. I never happened to meet her there."

"She's worth knowing, I'll wager," said the doctor, disappointed; and I heard him mumble, "*très distinguée, très fine!*" as the wicked, smiling eyes of the lady followed our disappearance between the shrubbery borders of another pebbled alley. Most of the patients who sunned themselves in the garden in the morning had grown accustomed to our eccentricities, but people who walked or drove down that side street near the Bois, and caught sight of us through the iron fence, used often to stare at the open gate, with its sign, "Maison d'Hydrothérapie et de Massage" — and very evidently wonder whether we were not really a band of lunatics, running two by two, in rhythmical, concerted swing over the narrow paths. We, on our side of the fence, used greatly to enjoy their astonished countenances, and in order to make them gape the wider, would raise above our heads the wands that we held against our chests, with the majestic sweeping movement advocated by Mme. Gibert, the doc-

tor's assistant; take deep breaths, lift our chins, and leaning back in delicious relaxation against our spines, sail down one of the gentle slopes of the garden.

We ran in quaintly assorted pairs, varying from day to day as chance or the doctor's caprice would have it. One could count, however, on finding my American friend — "Victory in green," they called her, because of the fine, free movement of her long limbs and the noble poise of her head — at the front of the line. She was not as strong as she looked, and was trying to offset her studies in socialism by this novel form of exercise. The wholesale jeweller from Rouen, incensed but fascinated by her views, always ran as near her as he could, in order to have the pleasure of calling Jaurès names. The person who sought M. Bloc out, on the other hand, was Mme. de Sully, our *femme du monde*, a very dainty and mocking aristocrat. Mme. de Sully came to the garden, we inferred, to recover from one soirée and manufacture brilliancy for the next.

"It's a type, my dear child, whom Flaubert neglected to depict," she would whisper to me with dancing eyes, after she had dragged out of the guileless man the history of the business fail-

ure from which he was recuperating. I fear that Mme. de Sully did not hesitate to repair Flaubert's omission and that the familiars of her salon had a pretty clear picture of a stout, greasy jeweller, his provincial frock coat flapping, his ornate watch-chain dangling, and his breath and his temper failing, as he shouted into the ear of a nonchalant young woman in green: "He's a good-for-nothing, I tell you, your eloquent Jaurès — humbuggery, all your socialist cant!"

The doctor took pleasure in frustrating Mme. de Sully's attempts to win M. Bloc's private confidence. He himself was a narrow-chested little man, with a round beard that was turning gray, and pale, squinting, spectacled eyes, and had a sort of wriggling manner which combined apology and conceit. But that did not prevent him from raising our talk to the level of *les idées générales*, and harmonizing our odd crew of runners on philosophic heights. It was a strange way to make acquaintance with the great French art of general conversation. Our discussions often gave the doctor hints, he said, for the medical journal that he edited. Anything was grist to the mill of an editor who wrote all his own articles. He once brought me a copy of the journal and

pointed out, with the naïve pleasure of a young actor who whisks from one rôle to another, the three names under which he figured there.

"'Arnauld' — that's of course my psychological self; 'Schmidt' — he's a learned, bacteriological personage: German *terre-à-terre*, you understand; and as for 'Rabot,' poor fellow, he has to be a little of everything, an all-round medical man!"

"Arnauld" had an excellent professional reputation, and the Indian running was a by-product of some of his psychological researches in the East. Mme. Gibert, the assistant, whose well-worn crêpe marked her estate, shared his cult for the universal panacea. *La course indienne* was, indeed, the great inheritance of her impoverished widowhood, and she took pains to tell one — encouraging one to fall behind the others — how large a part in its discovery really belonged to her dear dead husband, who had been the doctor's companion on the famous journey. Dr. Arnauld's freethinking views were another of the poor lady's grievances. As a devout Catholic, she could not help running in terror of our discussions, especially after the *abbé* had been added to our number; the separation of Church and State was

the question of the hour and feelings were violently intense. Mme. Gibert singled me out, in the end, as the safest companion for her frightened young ecclesiastic, because I had, she reminded me, no right to any opinion whatever. I can still recall with a certain sympathy the agony that distorted his blue, smooth-shaven face, if anybody mentioned Briand.

My distinction was that of an interpreter, or connecting link between the Sanitarium and "*la course*." I was the only one of the runners who lived in the Establishment. The others, like Dr. Arnauld himself, came from the big world of Paris and went back to it at the end of the morning. But my injured knee required the massage and sprays of the hospital. It fell to me, accordingly, to explain, while we ran, the real patients, the inmates of the Institution: the Italian princess who glowered at us as she darkly hurried by with her prim English companion; or Mme. Y Vada, the pretty, elaborately flirtatious South American, sometimes accompanied through the alleys by a handsome, bronzed gentleman, presumably a husband, to whose gestured protestations she listened with a show of reluctance, turning away her head disdainfully, and holding

her skirt as if she were afraid of his brushing its hem. In the Sanitarium, on the other hand, I had to play protagonist for Dr. Arnauld and his system.

That very night I was accosted in the salon, where we gathered after dinner, by the satirical lady who had caught the doctor's attention on the steps. She was sitting in a corner, pretending to read, but really taking in the big room and its groups of people, with the same subtly amused flash of blue-green eyes and white teeth that had seemed so caustically to appraise us in the morning. She bowed to me and came forward, trailing her severely modish frock.

"We met or rather we did not meet in Auteuil, Mademoiselle?" she began, holding out her hand. "So you could not stand the other place, either? Old and dingy it certainly was, and so few of the modern appliances. In America, you're used to better things."

Thus Mme. Vernet introduced herself, somehow conveying the impression that a need of massage and electric currents made a bond between a clever Frenchwoman and a quiet young American. She asked me to sit down beside her and tell her about that curious "sport." Did it truly heal

broken bones, make the fat thin, and the thin fat, and turn blue devils into *joie de vivre,* as they said? Without her hat and veil she looked older than I had supposed her, and almost ugly. Her heavy masses of straight, copper-red hair, dressed high above her forehead, brought out the worn, sharpened lines of her dead-white skin; her narrow eyes had a repellent inscrutableness in their greenish depths, and her teeth protruded a little when her lips rolled back in that wicked little laugh. But hers was a genuine if rather a sinister fascination, and it became our habit to sit together, every evening, and hold an impersonal conversation about life and literature. I never understood what won me Mme. Vernet's attention, unless it were precisely our common detachment from the strange world in which we found ourselves. She had met a good many American girls, she said, but never one before whose first French initiations had come behind the walls of sanitariums.

"The Paris you Americans like to think you have learned in hotels near the Boulevards, in Neuilly schoolrooms, or even in the ateliers, is far from being the Paris of the Parisians," she remarked, with her mysterious smile. "I don't be-

lieve, you know, that you need regret your more bizarre experience."

Just how bizarre the place was, how different from what I was later — in spite of Mme. Vernet — to conceive as the Paris of the Parisians, I did not then realize. I had already spent a month in a small sanitarium at Auteuil, but this larger establishment, with its group of buildings, its extensive hydropathic arrangements, its staff of resident doctors and white-robed nurses, had much more to stir my foreigner's curiosity. I had had there, on the depressing winter afternoon of my arrival, the warmest welcome from Sœur Marie-Thérèse, whose part it was to sit in the office and write out, in a great ledger full of her delicate script, a detailed account of each new patient.

"You are from Massacusek?" — so she pronounced my native State. "*Ma Mère*, just think of it, Mademoiselle is from the very place where our poor, driven-out Sisters have been so well received!" Mère Ernestine smiled dimly, over folded hands. It was hard, she impassively murmured, that the grace of God should no longer be manifested to her Order except in distant countries.

Sœur Marie-Thérèse's ideas about America

were exceedingly definite — were they drawn, I wondered, from the letters that the outcasts wrote from Lowell, Massachusetts? — and she had assigned me to the "châlet," because the rooms there had the metallic furniture, the sanitary walls, and the round, dustless corners to which, she said, I must be accustomed. How grim it all was, and in what a submarine gloom those green, chilly walls seemed to envelop me, when Sœur Marie rustled away, jingling her keys and her rosary, through the glass door that opened on a wooden platform, above the pebbled court. The head doctor would make his ceremonial visit in a small half-hour or so, she warned me, and meanwhile I might unpack.

The shiver of the moment is with me yet, and that is perhaps why I so clearly remember how much my unpacking was enlivened by a dramatic bubbling of tears that soon declared itself in the next room. Even a brief acquaintance with sanitarium life is enough to teach one that if ladies' smiles sometimes mean tragedy, ladies' tears may often be taken as a key to romantic comedy. So I was cheered, on the whole, to hear, in spite of myself, this sound of weeping mingled with shrill consolations and reproaches.

"Dry your eyes, *ma petite,*" — I could not help eavesdropping, — "you *must* see your *fiancé* today. Do you not hear him, poor dear, pacing up and down the court, like a caged lion?"

The impatient rattle of spurs and a sword reached several pairs of ears tensely eager to catch the leonine tread.

"*Oh, oh, Maman, je t'en prie —*"

"No, Louise, I shall call him this minute. Now, Georges," encouraged a conciliatory voice as the window of the next room opened. Heavy footsteps echoed on the wooden platform and a military silhouette passed across the lace of my curtain. But the doctor's knock at the corridor door prevented me from following the next stage of the romance.

The doctor's polite and well-groomed air was borne out by the easy confidence of the apology with which he entered. Of course, he said, as I was under the care of an outside doctor, as (he understood) I had merely come to the Establishment for the sake of the massage and the running, he should not often need to see me. It was customary, however, to make a preliminary visit in all cases, and unless I were different from the others I should not mind? Women needed a con-

fessor, and those who had outgrown the priests had to fall back on the psychologists. So he complacently began, seating himself in one of the gray metallic chairs, stretching out his thin, neat legs, stroking his full, brown beard, and turning his sharply penetrating eyes upon me. Had I been brought up on a bottle, in infancy? His eyebrows rose at my involuntary smile. "A fundamental point, Mademoiselle, I assure you." Though I was used to French analytical methods I was more than usually interested by the rapier-like attack of this specialist who knew how, with a few clever questions, to extract a life history, from the cradle up to date, omitting, as he thought, no significant mental or moral or physical reaction. A mind well stocked with psychological labels and convenient pigeon-holes found ten minutes quite sufficient for the purpose.

"Are you a socialist, too, like your friend who runs?" inquired the doctor, rising to take his leave at the end of that time. "No? I am one myself, naturally, but I should not dare to admit this to every one. Let me give you a hint that the subject's not well regarded in the Establishment. It's not yet a fashionable doctrine — the name of Combes is anathema here, you understand.

These excellent Sisters, with their charming superstitions!"

Perhaps his laughing warning was meant to include an etching of a nymph gazing at her image in a woodland spring that I had happened to pin up on one of the blankest spaces of my wall. Madeleine, the elderly chambermaid, was more explicit. She stood before it next morning, her arms akimbo, after she had opened my shutters.

"She is not overdressed, this lady. *Tout de même, elle n'est pas mal;* no, she is not at all bad-looking," she continued, still critically examining. "Louis agrees with me. Louis is my husband, Mademoiselle knows? — the little *valet de chambre*. We had a good view of the picture last night, while Mademoiselle was at dinner. Louis advised me to warn Mademoiselle that Mère Ernestine would be displeased. 'With Sœur Marie it might perhaps go down,' said he, 'but not with the good Mother.' Why, when a former patient out of gratitude to the hospital sent a jardinière with some innocent Cupids on it, Mère Ernestine wept that we had harbored such an infidel in our midst. Well, I must go," she ended, as a bell rang in the distance. "Mademoiselle will not mind if I send my little Louis in with her breakfast? He likes to

help me with my trays. A married man, *quoi! Une dame en peignoir, ça lui est tout à fait égal.*"

This was several weeks earlier than my meeting with Mme. Vernet in the salon, and long before she came I had learned the customs of the place and established the order of my days. Philosophic running and massage filled the mornings; drives with friends and relatives took me to the real world in the afternoons; and in the evenings I dined in the central *pavillon*, and became a part of the Sanitarium life.

On the strength of my race I had been put at the "American" table, but the United States shrank to very small proportions on the map when *l'Américaine du Nord* found herself surrounded by families from Guatemala and the Argentine, and opposite a young doctor from Venezuela. The Argentine family, which was made up of a swarthy father, a monumentally lifeless mother, glittering with jet, and two handsome, dark twin daughters of the same overripe and prematurely fading type, was apparently abounding in good health. One of the girls wore a large diamond on her left hand. Her button-black eyes sparkled, too, and she was full of busy chatter of the great dressmakers. In the other twin, sulki-

ness was the dominant characteristic. She explained, one evening, that they were living at the Sanitarium for the sake of an invalid brother — "So we *say*," she added with pique. "You know my sister has become engaged to one of my brother's doctors? She was bound to marry in Paris" — Her voice faltered as Mme. Y Vada gave her a pointed glance across the table. Mme. Y Vada was advising the *fiancée* about the intricacies of the trousseau. This very pretty lady from Gautemala seemed also in great health and spirits, except when husbands were mentioned; then she drooped her curly eyelashes, sighed heavily, and planted a languorous kiss on the forehead of her precocious little girl, who had been taught, in response, to droop her eyelids, too, and exclaim with doll-like precision, "*Pauv' p'tite maman chérie!*"

Dr. Maximo Sebastiano Gonzalez, my *vis-à-vis*, never failed, at the recurrence of this little episode, to blush all over his fat, pallid face, and blink his tiny blue eyes with embarrassment. He was a much nicer young man than he looked, and developed a worried eagerness for intellectual discourse. He did not dream, he ingenuously confided, that a woman lived who had read

Nietzsche! I must admit that we approached philosophy by way of the Boulevards, for Señor Gonzalez always opened fire by asking me, with a downward glance at his plaid waistcoat and his necktie, which were of a new pattern every evening, what I had seen in the way of *nouveautés* that day. He was frankly enjoying the "novelties" of Paris, and it was some time before I made out that he was living in the Maison d'Hydrothérapie to pursue his medical studies, and watch the progress of an invalid friend.

But if the South Americans did not seem to belong to the invalid class, neither, at first sight, did most of the other inmates of the Sanitarium. As Mme. Vernet and I used to say to each other, they might have been taken for the patrons of an exceptionally quiet and distinguished hotel, going in and out, dining sociably and at length, walking up and down the corridors in gossiping lines afterwards, and then scattering into conversational groups in the salon. At one end of the room, you would always find the Italian princess playing cards with her English companion; about the bookshelves, with their very innocuous contents, often gathered a few literary souls who were absorbed in never-ending differences as

to what the *jeune fille* should or should not read. Others turned the pages of *L' Illustration*, drummed on the piano, or wrote letters. What, we asked ourselves, was the secret of those who were not here for massage or for some personal reason — like finding a husband? It did not take us long to discover.

The Italian princess was given away by her red hands and her black looks. She was a beautiful girl, whose dusky hair and olive cheeks gave a rich bloom to her air of race; but her heavy eyebrows were always drawn together in a scowl, and her hands were rough and swollen, "like those of the traditional washerwoman," Mme. Vernet remarked. It appeared that she had a passion for washing them, her clothes, the floor, or anything else, and had, besides, smashed so many priceless heirlooms over the head of an unoffending father that he had decided to send her here for a cure before her marriage. A noble prince, more concerned with her fortune — she had had an American mother — than with her tantrums, or with her overcleanliness, was claiming his bride next month.

"I asked her," Mme. Y Vada said, with her simpering giggle, "what getting married was,

anyhow. 'It's wearing a veil, and carrying orange blossoms,' she told me. Ah, *la malheureuse!*"

In the end, all the "*tics*" revealed themselves, in one way or another. The shy and melancholy gentleman from the Midi, who had been the director of an orchestra, and always carried a score, bound in shiny black leather, under his arm, persistently avoided walking on the cracks of the parquet. In the corridors he advanced with his eyes down, now taking a mincing step, now a giant stride, and only seemed to breathe freely and hold up his head when he found himself on the carpeted floor of the salon. He was very fond of talking over the operas with Mme. Bigot, a mild, white-haired lady who used to play solitaire in a corner, for hours at a time. One rainy morning during *la course indienne* — we always ran under umbrellas on wet days, and the more bedraggled and wet we got, the more argumentative we became — Dr. Arnauld pointed out a patient figure, standing in the downpour at one of the side doors of the main building.

"*Quelle drôle de femme* — she's been there for an hour," he said, "with no umbrella. A queer way to take the air!" When, after the lesson was over, I went to investigate, I found gentle Mme.

Bigot, with water dripping from her bare head and running in streams off her shoulders and down her back.

"Is it locked? Have you rung?" I asked in surprise. She shook her head, and as I opened the door she scuttled past me and up the stairs, leaving a puddle at every step.

"*Mon Dieu!*" exclaimed Sœur Marie-Thérèse, coming out of her office, and stirred from her usual calm: "they're tiresome, all the same, these people with their 'fears.' Poor Mme. Bigot daren't turn a door-handle, or ring a bell, and she must eat with a wooden spoon. You know she was hurt by a knitting-needle last year, and can't bear the touch of metal. But the doctor guarantees that he will send her away cured, as he did a similar case just now, to the point that she can hold the handle-bars of a bicycle through the streets of Paris."

How the patients with one sort of *idée fixe* loved to deride the peccadilloes of the others! That very evening I heard Mme. Bigot and the little musician chuckling together over the news that Mlle. Louise had put on and taken off her blouse fifteen times that day, before she could decide between the blue and the pink.

"To go to so much trouble, too, *cher monsieur*, over blouses that reek of the provinces," laughed Mme. Bigot, with uncommon ill-nature.

Mlle. Louise, an anæmic girl of my own age from Clermont-Ferrand, was the person, after Mme. Vernet, who most sought my society, and used to lure me out for walks in the garden, hoping to discover that I, too, was the victim of an unfortunate love affair. I believe she was sceptical to the end, and still thinks of me as unkindly reserved. She was always trying new tactics; she read me love poems by de Musset; she told me how unfeelingly Mme. Durand, a rotund Parisian bourgeoise of forty, spoke of the *petites amourettes* of young girls; and as a last resort, gave significant hints about her own broken heart.

"Ah, without doubt, it is prudent to keep one's own counsel," she would say, tossing her head with an offended and incredulous air, when I was unable, for my part, to produce a cracked organ. That least pleasing attribute of the French, their *méfiance*, their suspicion of one's motives and policies, was in Mlle. Louise very strongly marked. She revenged herself by casting doubts on a string of amethysts I sometimes wore.

"What do you see in such purple glass, I won-

der! You realize that in my part of the world those stones are too common for ladies to wear? And of course the setting's not real gold? Indeed? You surprise me." She warned me against Mme. Vernet too. "*Il y a quelque chose* — there's certainly something there. Very *comme il faut* she seems, but believe a Frenchwoman, my dear, who scents a mystery."

A mystery — of course! If Mme. Vernet and I discussed the mysteries of our companions, their origins and their cures, hers was always even more present to us both. She was looking for apartments; she had rendezvous with lawyers; she was called for and whirled swiftly away by elegant worldlings, in polished limousines. The fact, moreover, that she was sometimes preoccupied and morose, sometimes triumphantly talkative, made one realize the unsettled condition of her present; and her habitual irony savored bitterly of past disillusions. She evidently belonged to a conspicuous literary *milieu;* her way of slandering popular novelists, and throwing an overbright light on the figures of great Academicians betokened, it was clear, some actual initiation.

Of her personal life I had had, nevertheless, no definite knowledge till the evening when, hav-

ing by chance finished dinner early, and reached the salon at the same time, we sat together watching the other people straggle in: the princess, scowling and red-handed; Mlle. Louise, looking indecisively love-lorn in her bright pink blouse, with a volume of poetry in her hand; and a dozen others, in whom we were now unable not to discern the flaw under the conventional surface. Mme. Vernet's face, chalk-white and weary, wore, I observed, a peculiarly detached and malign expression, and when she saw the little musician down the long vista of the corridor approaching the door with his hybrid gait, she spoke out, at last.

"To think," she said, with a concentrated venom in her light Parisian inflection, — "to think that for ten years I have lived with a man who has every one of these foibles — to give them a pretty name — in an even more marked degree. Thank Heaven, it's over now! Did n't you know," she went on, her lips curling back in that sophisticated smile, "did n't you really know that I am divorcing my husband? What a discreet young person! Any one would have told you. Ten years is enough, believe me. I did not propose to bear it any longer, to sacrifice my whole life. Nor,

please God, shall I ever be caught again. When my father, a hard-headed business man, you know, went with me to-day to see an apartment I am taking in the Champs Élysées, and began to shake his head over the expense, I brought him up short. 'I want,' I told him, 'to be comfortable and happy enough not to make a fool of myself a second time.' He had nothing to say to that."

To get a divorce, however, seemed to be a slower business than to cure a bad knee, and I left the Establishment before Mme. Vernet did. Yet by the time I went there had been many changes. The girl in the next room to mine had stopped weeping, and become reconciled to her military lover; Mme. Bigot was using a silver spoon instead of a wooden one, and was expected to advance to the door-handle stage very soon. Among the South Americans, there had been veritable revolutions; the young doctor had been recalled by cable to fill a post in Venezuela, and the Argentine twins had apparently exchanged rôles: the unaffianced sister was less sulky, and the eyes of the other were suspiciously red. Her dilemma was explained when she took me aside, on the eve of my own flight, to ask me if I did not want to buy something from her trousseau. What,

she inquired, did I think of a man who would leave you with dozens of handkerchiefs on your hands, none of which cost less than twenty francs; and any number of Paquin frocks? It had been broken off; Señorita Maria Maddelena dissolved in tears on my shoulder. Nobody sympathized, said the unhappy girl, not even Mme. Y Vada, who had decided to pardon her husband, and was going off to Guatemala.

I was glad, myself, to escape to the Ravignacs' and the everyday atmosphere of a French bourgeois family, which brought one so much closer to the springs of French life and character than this abnormal internationalist *milieu* could do. Mme. Vernet expressed regret at my going, and invited me to drink tea with her later, on the Champs Élysées. But the Ravignacs were inclined to disapprove, and made a point of speaking of her to a literary friend, who often came to lunch. He gave a small whistle of amusement.

"*Tiens, tiens*, so *you* have found Mme. Vernet's retreat — while we've all been puzzling over it! A brilliant woman, but devoured by ambition. And *méchante!* — what a biting tongue! Though she is getting a divorce for incompatibility, it is well known that she has no real grievance, except

thwarted ambition; that charming and sensitive fellow, Vernet, has not turned out the successful novelist she thought he was going to be when she married him."

This news put an end to any possibility of my seeing Mme. Vernet again, for a guest of the Ravignacs, where we are very clear about the status and duties of a wife, could not even pay her a call. But Mme. Vernet was not a person whom one forgets; a smile like hers never altogether fades. I was not prepared, however, for the manner in which it was again to be made vivid to me on my return to Paris, several years later.

I had arrived in the early spring, and found, it seemed to me, only one subject of conversation besides aeroplanes: a new play, called *Janus*. One must not put off going, every one urged. It was very powerful, the extraordinary success, not only of the year, but of the decade. The author's name was unfamiliar — Adolphe Vernet. To me, in any case, it meant nothing till Dr. Arnauld dotted the *i's*.

The Sanitarium garden was not far from my apartment, and I remembered that my old psychological friend was always glad to welcome his "cures." So I wandered in, one morning, and

waited at the corner of an alley, where the patients were strolling, just as they used to do, until he should discover me. His near-sighted eyes are quicker for human recognitions than any I know; he saw me from far away, and hurried forward.

"Well, Mademoiselle!" — but he did not waste much time over trivial amenities; he could hardly wait to open a subject of thrilling mutual interest.

"You've been to Vernet's play, of course? A great modern drama, at last, you agree? Vernet is n't the first man who has grown under misfortune. What a retribution for his late wife though! Do you remember how I speculated about her, and that inscrutable look of hers, the first day when we saw her watching us from the steps? Well, consider what added gall it must hold now; she married a nonenity a year after her divorce. There's a subject for Molière, who loved to show up human tricks. Yes, yes, hers was a sorry trick — or was it a *tic?*" queried the doctor dryly. "Why not? For myself, I'd rather undertake to cure the fear of a door-handle than the fear of mediocrity."

A shuffling of feet, an indrawing of breaths, and a shrill babble of argument, in which the word "modernism" seemed to dominate, heralded the

approach of the runners. I heard Mme. Gibert's plaintive voice: "No animosity, I beg, *mes amis*. You 're losing the rhythm, Monsieur. *Allons, allons*, all together, *un, deux, trois, quatre, one*, two, three, four." With a fine flourish of wands, the band emerged from the shrubbery and loped past us, over the crunching pebbles.

"Diverse and argumentative as ever, you see," commented Dr. Arnauld, smoothing his round stubble of gray beard with a satisfied air. "*Tics* and tricks, *tics* and tricks, it's an odd world, psychologically, in or out of sanitariums."

···· II ····

Standards of a Bourgeois Family

'Plus me plaist le séjour qu'ont basty mes ayeux
Que des palais Romains le front audacieux.

Mme. Ravignac would be called in Maine "a plain family woman"; in Paris I have heard her labeled, by the more intellectual of her acquaintance, "the true type of a bourgeois housewife." For all that, when I received, a few days ago, a letter announcing that she had decided to sell the fine old house and garden above the Seine, and move to a flat where there would be no place for *pensionnaires*, the news came like an international calamity.

Who now, I wonder, will help American girls to catch a glimmer of the significance that a commonplace surface may conceal? By living out her busy, self-forgetful days before their eyes, Mme. Ravignac somehow invested simplicity and the dull domestic round with a new meaning and an unaccustomed charm. It was not merely that economy bloomed in her hands into a subtly creative art; more important was the sense which

she unconsciously conveyed, that the roots of her average family were nourished, in this supposedly inconstant Paris, too, by the rich soil of a consistent and nobly serious theory of life. An impersonal theory, it seemed, which tested the passions and aims of mere individuals by their conformity to the established laws of a great civilized society. Yet it obviously yielded such deep personal satisfactions that the most empty-headed of *pensionnaires*, who began by pitying Mme. Ravignac's limitations, found herself, sooner or later, examining in their light the foundations and rewards of her own restless and uncharted activities.

What "theory" or system could possibly underlie the kaleidoscopic existence of the daughters of liberty to whom they have opened their doors so generously in the last few years has, I know, been a constant puzzle to the logical minds of the Ravignacs; and I fear that M. Ravignac, poor man, was summing up his final conclusions on the occasion of his characterizing the life of the American girl as one long and preposterous picnic. The moment was one of supreme exasperation, when logic will out, and it struck me at the time as portentous. Mme. Ravignac, though she

thoroughly agreed with him, hastened to take the part of the picnickers. But indeed she always found excuses for them — they had not been taught as French girls are from early childhood, she used to tell her husband, to consider every day as a link to be carefully wrought into the chain of the years — and she spoiled them, dear Madame, quite too much.

How many times I have seen her mending the clothes of the heedless. "Why, it's just a stitch," she would defend herself, "and I can't let a good frock go to pieces." How many times I have heard her explain American customs to friends who dropped in on purpose to remark that Mlle. Smith seemed to be a charming girl, but what a pity she should go motoring alone with young men! The extravagant had only to express an intention of patronizing one of the Immortals on the rue de la Paix, and Madame bestirred herself to secure a discount, by the influence, perhaps, of an acquaintance who had a cousin in the cloth business. "No use in spending more than you need, my dear," she would say, and sit down to write several notes. But she was even more ready to help the economical to bargain for a "model," or a bit of old lace, and summoned an

infinite variety of *petits fournisseurs* to their service. At Mme. Ravignac's the belle always found a rose on her table when she was dining out; the invalid always had a special dish; the literary aspirant was taken to distinguished salons on Sunday afternoon. M. Ravignac himself not infrequently left his sculptor's studio to escort deputations of the "artistic" to private views, or to make a *petit tour* with them in the Louvre or the Cluny.

That none of these privileges were "nominated in the bond"—for on principle the Ravignacs merely offered a home to girls who were old enough to be learning their Paris independently—makes one regret the more that the picnickers have proved unworthy of them. It was not hard to read between the discreet lines of Mme. Ravignac's letter. "You may not be surprised," it ran, "though I know you will grieve with me about the change. *Mais, que voulez-vous?* My husband feels that not only the material but the spiritual education of our daughters demands a quiet place by ourselves. Their future and their *dots* will, moreover, be secured by the sacrifice of the house. This does not mean, however," the letter ended, "that there will not always be a

room for our friends. How long it seems since you, *chère amie*, ceased to be a *pensionnaire!* We understood one another, I believe, from the moment when I found you in that *triste* place, and decided to make you our first guest."

"That *triste* place" — the words recall the involuntary exclamation wrung from Mme. Ravignac by the aspect of my sanitarium room. I can see her standing there in the middle of the floor, a slight figure in heavy mourning, holding the hand of a solemn small daughter, dressed likewise in black, and hear her cry, as her penetrating glance turned dubiously from the green calcimined blankness to the young American, "*Mais — c'est lugubre!*" *Lugubrious* — that single adjective was a final appraisement.

"Dismal, indeed, my strange young lady from over the sea," repeated Bette, — though in silence, for even at three years old she was well disciplined to polite usage, — drinking in my strangeness from under the stiffly rolled brim of her patent-leather hat, whose shiny surface, broken only by a ribbon that hung straight down behind, struck me as mirroring inflexibly the general dreariness of my abode. Bette's great

brown eyes were relentless mirrors too, and I remember just how she looked, to the last detail of her plump red cheeks, her long black lashes, and the curls arranged with such glossy coquetry over her shoulders. But it is significant — since even now her mother's spirit is more vivid to me than her features — that I should have kept no such definite first impression of Mme. Ravignac beyond her general air of capacity and the light in her gray eyes. It was a soft light as well as a keen one that flashed at me from their oddly tilted corners, and an impulse of generous devotion, which I was soon to recognize as her dominant characteristic, sounded in her next words: —

"You may come to-morrow — do come to-morrow! I must, of course, speak with my husband first," — this phrase became as familiar as the unselfishness,— "but I am sure he will agree with me. *Il faut s'arranger:* one must take life as it comes. The house is too expensive for us with our small family; and besides, it is so vast, so solitary since my father's death. And I have so much the habit of illness that I can massage your knee myself, and give you a régime which will set you up at once. My poor father" — her narrow eyes grew misty — "was often tempted by my little

dishes. You must tell your relatives," she concluded, with the smile at once caustic and tender in which one seemed to detect the perpetual struggle of her heart to modify the native dryness of her judgment, "that I shall take great care of you. *Chez moi,* let me say in passing, only the best materials are used. It is a home we offer, and the tradition of our food, inherited, of course, from my mother, cannot injure the most delicate stomach. *Viens, ma fille,*" she said, turning to Bette, "tell Mademoiselle that she will be welcome in your parents' house."

The Ravignacs, looking facts in the face, had accepted in theory the necessity of *pensionnaires,* and my semi-invalidism went far to make the first practical application of the theory endurable to Mme. Ravignac. But neither I nor the two or three other American girls who soon made their appearance at the old house can have realized, at the time, the cost to a family of this type — a family of bourgeois and intellectual inheritance — of taking strangers into their midst. What is customary in Germany and not unknown in England and America, violates in France an intimacy prized above anything in life. But the Ravignacs' delicate hospitality, once their decision was made,

gave no hint of intrusion. Madame made light of the criticism of her friends. "*Cela m'est bien égal!* How, pray, can I give up the house that my father built, the house where I was married, the house, too, where my own children were born? You will notice," she continued, as she showed me about, on the first day, through the four stately, high-ceiled apartments on the ground-floor, "that these rooms are all connected? It was for my sake, Mademoiselle. 'It's for the day of your marriage, my child, that I have built the house thus,' my father used to say to me, when I was quite a little girl, 'so that all our friends may celebrate with us the consummation of your happiness.' Ah, Mademoiselle, that was a beautiful day when it came — as yours will be," she added inevitably. "The studio had already been built, down there in the garden, for my husband was glad to help me not to desert papa."

We had been standing at a long window which opened on a narrow balcony. The front windows faced a quiet avenue where chestnut trees bloomed in the spring; but from those at the back, one looked far over the intimate enclosure of the garden and down upon the Seine, as it flowed under its arching bridges: the eye could follow its

silver windings all the way from the close-built, towered region of the town's gray heart, on the one hand, to where, in the other distance, beyond pale reaches, the blurred outlines of wooded heights announced the park of Saint-Cloud. No *pensionnaire* could help blessing Madame's father for remaining *campagnard de cœur*, as she put it, in spite of his laboratory, and choosing such a site in memory of Burgundy. Everybody enjoyed the spacious rooms, with their solid, carved furniture, their hangings which Madame had herself embroidered in her *jeune fille* days, and their polished floors which reflected so brightly the gleam of the open fires.

It was tradition again that gave us our polished floors. The family purse might be slim, but a meek little personage known as *le frotteur* never failed to glide in with his heavy brush on Saturday, to rub them into a state of waxed perfection over which high "American" heels must pick their way with care. If the heels, as the young ladies asserted, were "French" rather than "American," then America, Madame declared, was perpetuating the outworn absurdities of Queen Marie Antoinette, which the ancestors of her good shoemaker, down there on the *quai*, had discarded at the time of the

Revolution. Mme. Ravignac had never displayed a heel above two inches high in her life, and obviously considered those of her *pensionnaires* unbecoming to the simplicity that nature and society demanded of young girls.

The theory of the *jeune fille* as a creature altogether innocent and obliterated was, however, far from being that of Mme. Ravignac. Her father, a good Catholic bourgeois citizen, turned scientist and professor, had married, as she said, "the sort of woman such a man chooses," so that conventions which prevail alike in less cultivated and in smarter circles had not narrowed her upbringing; she had read a great deal, and gone out alone, as a matter of course, after the age of eighteen. In her father's set greater "protection" would have seemed prudish affectation.

"You foreigners," she once exclaimed, "have indeed an odd conception of well-brought-up girlhood in France. I know what you say: 'Poor little French girls, never allowed to amuse themselves, never free to make use of their own legs and eyes!' It's no more true of our friends than the *mariage de convenance*."

Mme. Ravignac herself, as she often told us, had made, rather late, a *mariage d'amour*, after

having freely refused several unimpeachable *partis*, and this marriage was undoubtedly tending to emphasize more and more her temperamental bent toward an absorbed and circumscribed domesticity. For her children were exacting, her husband was not an "intellectual," and since her father's death there was little to bind her to his world of ideas but ties of long-established use and affection. Yet her liberal youth had revealed to her the meaning of intellectual curiosity and artistic ambition; she could understand very well what called young America to cross the sea. But for a nice girl of twenty to wear rustling silk linings, striking furs, a red coat, or pearl ear-rings — this was incomprehensible, this seemed to her almost disreputable.

"*Ah, vous êtes belle, Mademoiselle, il ne faut pas faire tant de frais pour nous* — you must not be so formal with us simple folk," was her greeting to Mlle. Jones, of New York, when that pretty young person appeared at dinner in a very elaborate evening gown. It was lightly and graciously spoken, but Mlle. Jones looked down, as with new eyes, on her frills, and from them to Madame's plain, tight-fitting black. And she was not long in discovering that in the authentic Paris, as the

Ravignacs understood it, the boulevards and the café concerts were no less banal and factitious than the frills.

One of Madame's favorite stories, indeed, related how, at a scientific congress, an American professor of physics had asked her father to show him "Maxim's." "*Pensez donc, mon ami,*" she would say to her husband across the table, laughing heartily for the thousandth time at the incomparable humor of the suggestion, "Just think, papa at Maxim's! Papa, who had to be dragged from his test-tubes to his meals, and even resented the time he gave to his lectures at the Collège de France!"

"But don't painters and poets go to the cafés, Monsieur?" asked one bold young woman.

"Not to those commercialized boulevard places, Mademoiselle, you may be sure," replied M. Ravignac with finality. "They have something better to do," he ended, proceeding to replenish Bette's plate, and mix her wine and water, and looking up, surprised, at the general laugh.

"You don't make much of a bohemian, my poor Jean," said Madame, happily accepting her spouse anew — his stout awkward figure, his square-cut black beard, his honest black eyes,

which held no shadow of irony — with her smile of cherishing devotion.

M. Ravignac might be a sculptor, but family affection and bourgeois conviction were indeed written large on his every feature and attitude. *Un brave homme* — a fine sort, you would call him on sight: industrious and hard-working to the point of bustle, and fundamentally kind and good in spite of a hot temper. When one read his favorite journal, *Le Temps*, his very words seemed to repeat themselves down the page, and I doubt whether he would have admitted the validity of any political or social theory not summed up in those well-bred, conservative columns. If socialism was abhorrent to his soul, so also was any revolutionary principle in art; he preferred the Français to the Théâtre Antoine, and, as regards the Salon, stood with the old Society against the new. Madame echoed his convictions with the intellectual submission that is entirely sincere in the French wife, even though her more flexible intelligence very evidently made her not only the practical administrator of her husband's daily life, but an infallible counsellor in his own province, as well.

A new conception of the relation of the sexes

founded on a new definition of equality was, then, one of the ideas that took shape in the heads of the *pensionnaires* during those long slow meals in the panelled dining-room, which proved their chief hours of illumination. Against this somber background, the changing shades of comment and criticism in Mme. Ravignac's pale, mobile face, the quick sure movements of her slender hands, became peculiarly impressive, and not one of her unrelenting analytical phrases missed fire, even if she seemed, when she let it fall, very much engaged with her youngest, the mischievous Jacqueline, whose high-chair touched her elbow. Her husband, on the other side of the table, was flanked by the high-chair of his adored Bette; and as this delicious *plat* succeeded that, under Madame's watchful eye, and Monsieur, for his part, pressed red wine upon his guests — the wine, like the cherries in May, came from a rustic Burgundian estate of which one heard a great deal — there was much time for mutual understanding.

Too much! complained those of the young ladies who were above international comparisons, and did not relish the familiar flavor of these pleasant, leisurely occasions. Of course, the most interesting revelation, to some of us, was the one

which proved the compatibility of economy and generosity. Dishes tempting and bountiful beyond the dreams of *gourmands* were here achieved, it was evident, by an art which took exact account of every cheese-paring, and calculated the value of a lettuce leaf; the lights were extinguished there during dinner, but the salon was always gay with fresh flowers; and though a white blouse might seem a luxury to our hostess, there was no doubt that she considered real lace a necessity.

The presence of the admirable Bette and her more vivid younger sister was a grievance to Mlle. Jones, who felt ill-used if they spilled wine on their bibs, and failed to understand that French manners are acquired, precisely, by a long familiarity with the uses of good society. Her nerves were upset by the constant jumping up and down; her sensibilities were shocked by the French habit of calling a spade a spade. And as for hearing over and over again that Madame's mother used only the best butter, or that her father preferred a cutlet to a steak, — "It's like living with ghosts," she grumbled.

When remarks of this sort were exchanged, under the breath, perhaps, and in a language which she was supposed not to understand, Mme.

Ravignac made no comment whatever. The language of *la politesse* was to her the universal tongue, so she kept those narrow tilted eyes of hers firmly fixed on her plate, knowing full well that if her husband, fuming in his chair, caught the least response in them, he would more likely than not jump to his feet and order the young woman incontinently out of the house. But though the lines about her mouth tightened, Mme. Ravignac never lifted her eyes till the danger point was past.

Then, with the quaint smile which, because it brought out such tender sparkles of light in their opaque gray, seemed to defy one to find a hint of criticism there, she would begin to tell us still another anecdote of her dear ghosts. Most of us had a great affection, not only for hers, but for Monsieur's ghosts, too; we felt them as much our intimates as Madame's brother the witty journalist, or any other of the artistic and scientific familiars who were always dropping in to lunch. No wonder their friends liked to come to the Ravignacs', for even if we were half-way through a meal, they were greeted with shrieks of joy from the little girls, Monsieur reinforced his exclamatory welcome by pumping their arms up and down, and Madame, after kissing them on both

cheeks, would hurry off, enchanted, to make them another omelet with her own hands.

The cook was used to these frequent invasions of her domain. Mme. Ravignac could not be called an easy mistress; she would teach her servants to save their wages; or nurse them if they were ill; but they did not stay long under her roof unless they proved themselves as nimble and executive and self-forgetful as herself. Work, not idleness, was the end of life, so she told her household and her children. Bette, at a very early age, was trained to be a *petite mère de famille.* And as for Mme. Ravignac, she was never too tired to spend her whole being in generous service; the more she could do for you, the better she loved you, as I who have been ill under her roof have reason to know. Her heart and will responded to every new obligation as to a trumpet blast, although, between her household and social duties, and the lessons and pleasures of the *pensionnaires*, there was not a moment she could call her own from nine in the morning, when she started off so gayly to do her marketing, wheeling Jacqueline in the go-cart, with Bette trudging alongside under the patent-leather hat, till she came down to dinner at seven, an unusual color

in her long pale face, her straight brown hair falling down a little over her eyes, after bathing her pair and tucking them up for the night.

In the evening, if Mlle. Robinson did not have to be chaperoned to her dancing class, and there was nobody to dinner, Mme. Ravignac really had her husband to herself for an hour or so. And how she did count those hours! "*C'est si gentil, le soir*," she would say to me, "when we sit together in my father's study under the lamp, his books all about us, the children asleep in their beds in the next room, my husband reading *Le Temps* to me as I sew, and discussing his work and public affairs — ah, Mademoiselle, these are the rewards of marriage, these hours of intimate talk. My husband has the highest respect for my opinion, and you may guess what his wise guidance is to me." A husband was not a *beau chevalier*, who heaped roses in one's lap and spread a purple cloak for one's feet — that she made clear to romantic America. He was, rather, a constant weight, pressed close against one's heart, which now and then made this same heart bleed. But it was worth what suffering it brought, the marriage relation, and the things that hurt most were, after all, the non-essentials

— the childishness, the small stupidities of man. That was what men were like, especially the clever ones.

M. Ravignac's cleverness was one of the things that his wife loved to dwell upon. "*On demandera ça à mon mari*" was a phrase often on her lips. His sense for color — to take an instance — was impeccable. "Let's ask my husband; he'll know in a minute," she would suggest, when some girl was hesitating over the shade of a garniture. And Monsieur, the kind soul, would be summoned, all in his blouse, from his studio, a little bored to be disturbed, but on the whole rather flattered, and cast a critical eye on the costume before the long mirror. Monsieur liked pretty frocks as well as another of his race, and sometimes shook his head over his wife's hats in those later years when there came a little Jean, and finally a little Philippe to lessen her already faint interest in her own person, by adding to the duties as well as to the joys of life.

If Mme. Ravignac vaunted the "duties," it must not be thought that she did not also adore a certain sort of break in the domestic round. I am sure that I cannot be the only friend of the family

who, on a fine Sunday morning in spring, wakes with a sigh for Paris, and — remembering that this is the day sacred to excursions — sees the dear things starting out of the front door, Madame deftly tying the last cap, Monsieur faithfully buttoning the last coat, both of them hurrying Bette and Jacqueline and Jean and Philippe down the steps of the "Métro," dumping them breathless in their seats, and a little later lifting them out as breathlessly at some ugly station in a remote square. At the station door, I say to myself, their great friends, the painter Jolier and his wife, will be waiting impatiently with the tickets and the morning papers, and they will all run down the platform, excitedly chattering, climb into a compartment — possibly third class — and after a half-hour or so, alight at a little white village on a river bank. There will be, of course, poplars along this calm bank, and patient immovable figures holding fishing-lines, and, for the eye of the gentlemen, who never forget the approach of *midi*, an inn or two in the distance. One inn has a garden set with little tables — that looks a bit expensive, so why not try the other, which offers a more sociable long table, under an arbor?

Every detail of the meal comes back to me: the

teasing humors of Liline, always naughty and *spirituelle;* the whispered reproofs of Bette, over whose serious maternal care for her sister and brothers the two ladies exchange a moved look; the bewilderment of the clumsy country waiter, jolted out of his week-long sleep, and tormented by the jokes and the demands of these Parisians. There are ruminative pauses, anecdotic interludes, and deep degustations. Over the coffee, the gentlemen, mindful of their professions, discuss the *nuances* of the view: how it has been "done"; how the present school is doing it; how it may be done in next year's Salon. Then there is the afternoon, with its adventurous essay of the stream in a rowboat, the long slow walk along a dusty ribbon of white road, Jean and Philippe trailing more and more behind till they are lifted to well-cushioned masculine shoulders; the drinking of mild pink *sirop* in another garden, full by this time of other family parties; and finally the return to Paris, after a day in which nothing intrinsically interesting has been said or done, with a conviction of high holiday and achievement.

Such diversions, be it clearly understood, have their established place, like marketing, or going to

school, or making your first communion, in the scheme of bourgeois existence, and do not turn life itself into a picnic in the sense used by M. Ravignac at the meal which his wife's letter recalls. By way of further elucidation of his dictum, and of the loss it brings, in my opinion, to the young Americans who should have been the future generations of *pensionnaires*, I must revert to the occasion in question.

Though time had changed me from a *pensionnaire* to a friend with all the privileges of "dropping in," I realized when I arrived at the house that day and found the family, with Alice White, the tall American blonde of the moment, already assembled in the dining-room, that my hour had been ill-chosen. Something had gone wrong. Mme. Ravignac embraced me warmly, nevertheless, and said, as if she were not perturbed, and as if her husband were not obviously out of sorts, that it was delightful I had come, for my old friend, her brother Jacques, had arrived the night before from his journey in the East, and was stopping with her till his own flat should be prepared. They were waiting for him now; Liline had been sent to call him. "While we stifle the pangs of hunger," added Monsieur, sharply reproving the

two little boys who sat opposite him, for shaking their yellow heads, wriggling in their chairs, and showing their bare knees above the table's edge. Bette, whose nine years and whose rôle of *fille aînée* now made her quite equal to any situation, tossed her curls over her shoulders and inquired, in a politely conversational tone, whether Mlle. Alice had enjoyed her morning's work. Madame was just poking her head down the dumb-waiter to summon the omelet anyhow, when Liline burst into the room.

"I think he has a toothache, poor Uncle Jacques," she began, in her monotonous childish treble, climbing into her chair, and backing around mechanically, so that her father might tie her bib, "I opened his door," — "You did n't knock?" exclaimed Madame, "will nothing teach this flyaway manners?" — "and he had a funny bandage over his mouth *comme ça*" — she seized two forks and held them against her thin cheeks with her most elf-like expression — "and he seemed very cross, and told me to say he was coming at once."

M. Ravignac took away the forks, and his faithful black eyes asked his wife a troubled question. The witty perceptions and volatile ways

of his second daughter were a perpetual trial; Bette's calm good sense and her tact seemed to him a much safer feminine endowment. Madame raised her eyebrows in response. She did not understand the toothache either.

We were just finishing our omelet when the door opened and M. Jacques appeared, correct and ironical, a heavy lock of gray hair carefully arranged over his forehead, and his grizzled mustaches screwed into the sharpest of military points. Four pairs of childish eyes — for even Bette, the paragon, yielded to temptation — examined his cheeks for a possible swelling, as he shook hands all round, and made a polite apology.

"*Mon oncle*," began the irrepressible Jacqueline, "have n't you —" "*Tais-toi, ma fille*," interrupted Madame, conquering a smile. For she had at once related the bandage to those impeccable mustaches; a lovely American blonde was worth the trouble of a thorough metallic curling, it appeared.

"*Eh bien, mon vieux*," began M. Jacques easily — he had a gift of turning the tables — looking from M. Ravignac, who was pouring out the wine with an abstracted air, to his sister, as she skillfully dissected the fowl — "well, you two, what

is the matter? You look, both of you, my excellent brother and sister, as if you were of Gautier's opinion — is n't it Gautier? — about the futility of existence. '*Rien ne sert à rien, et tout d'abord, il n'y a rien. Cependant tout arrive. Mais cela m'est bien indifférent,*'" he quoted. "I, for one, can't agree with him, not when I am visiting my best friends and drinking their *vin de bourgogne,*" and he sipped his wine with a pleasurable indrawing of the lips, tossed his gray lock, twisted his mustaches, and regarded me quizzically across the table.

"That's all very well for a successful journalist with no responsibilities," retorted Madame, helping herself to the last and least promising portion of the fowl, "but if you had four children to provide for, a big house on your hands, and Mlle. Marsh, one of your two guests of the winter who has gone off in a huff —"

"And why," interrupted M. Ravignac, fiercely pulling his square black beard, "why, do you suppose? Because we won't allow her to spoil our children, our well-brought-up children!"

"Now, now, *mon ami,*" corrected Madame gently, "you must remember that the poor woman is very much alone. My heart aches for

the poor dear — no wonder she loved our four too well. Here she is, Jacques, sufficiently pretty, rich, well educated, but her parents are dead, her sisters are married, she has n't a single binding tie. She did n't marry, all because her father wanted to keep her at home, if you'll believe it! He was lonely, and said there should be one old maid in every family — ah, I must say I don't understand it."

"Papa, I shall marry at eighteen," announced Liline, with conscious virtue.

"Parents," continued M. Ravignac impatiently, "who don't look forward to the day when they will be no more are no parents at all, in my opinion. Young girls don't always think ahead, naturally, and it is therefore the parents' duty to point out, at the suitable time, the only road to happiness — What is it, Marie?"

"A big bundle from the Bon Marché, for Mlle. White," replied the red-cheeked *bonne*, returning from one of her periodic journeys to answer the door; "fifty francs to pay."

"Don't disturb yourself, child," cried Mme. Ravignac. "I have the money in my pocket"; and she had hurried out before the young American had turned her pretty head.

"Are you getting the moral, Mademoiselle?" inquired M. Jacques mischievously of his *vis-à-vis*. Nothing really escaped her, but with an air of graceful and innocent detachment from mundane discussion she affected not to hear, and continued to dip the leaves of her artichoke in the thick yellow sauce.

"Thank you *so* much, dear Madame," she said very prettily to our returning hostess. "How do you always manage to have money on hand? I never have a sou! I am so enjoying this delicious sauce — was it a rule of your mother's? Will you give me the recipe?"

"Yes, indeed, *ma chère petite*," replied Madame. "I am too delighted to teach you any art I possess. Who knows but your husband will have a liking for French dishes? The most important thing for a sauce, as *maman* used to impress upon me, is to use the very best butter. Well, well, Marie, what is it this time?"

"A monsieur for Mlle. Alice" — Marie's cheeks flamed as she fell to clearing the table — "he is waiting in the salon, but he said I was to whisper to Mademoiselle that the train goes soon."

Alice blushed a little, too, but explained, with great self-possession, in spite of a sort of so-

lidifying of the family surface: "It's only my friend Jack Brown, Madame, and we are going sketching at Versailles"; and rising, she kissed Liline, smiled a general good-bye from her blue eyes, and swished nonchalantly through the door.

"*Jolie fille!*" remarked M. Jacques, with appreciation.

"Yes, indeed," said his sister eagerly; "we are devoted to her, are n't we, Jean?"

But Monsieur muttered something about spoiled children, and there followed rather a dismal pause. It was not, indeed, until Madame had made the coffee over the gas-jet in the corner, and the children, replete with *petits canards*, had been sent upstairs, that conversation was resumed.

"*Eh bien?*" asked M. Jacques, "now that we are by ourselves, what is it, really? This friend here," he added, turning to me, "your American interpreter; can't she clear up the difficulty?"

"Poor mademoiselle," agreed Madame; "we do consult her like a hand-book! But it's really nothing but the cantankerousness of Mlle. Marsh, which I have already described, and the admirers of Mlle. White, of whom you have just had a specimen."

"A charming creature, too." M. Jacques twisted his mustache.

"And obviously made for marriage," continued Mme. Ravignac. "She is lovely, clever, utterly adorable, *enfin*, and twenty-two years old — careless and unformed yet, but capable of the most beautiful development. This is evidently the time for her to be settling the lines of her life, but is she thinking seriously of matrimony? No, indeed, she's having far too good a time!"

"Seeing, even here in Paris," interjected her husband, "at least a dozen different young men. She enjoys them all, she tells us, each for a different reason —"

"Do not suppose," put in Madame a little anxiously, "that we question the propriety of her behavior. Her conduct is irreproachable, but all the same, and even though I have her mother's consent that she shall go out with them, it makes me uncomfortable, the neighbors and servants gossip, and, worst of all, it's exciting for the girl without leading anywhere."

"That is just what I maintain," M. Ravignac asserted, with an emphatic gesture. "Why should not Mlle. Alice's superfluity of gallants have the same result in the end as Mlle. Marsh's

lack of opportunity? If she waits and waits for the knight of her dreams! Well, I declare I understand this American system less every year."

M. Jacques, the ironist, who liked nothing better than to stir up his matter-of-fact brother-in-law, said something about his sister's having married for love. But Mme. Ravignac did not allow any jokes on that subject, and pointed out that if her marriage had succeeded it was because she had known how to adapt herself to its conditions, and had had a sound training in good housekeeping.

"Just so," agreed Monsieur, not to be distracted from his thesis. "There, on the contrary, is a girl who can't mend a stocking, and does n't know beef from pork."

"Ah, Jacques, it's pathetic!" cried Madame. "I take her to market, and explain how, when one pays a little more for the cutlet, one pays a little less for the fish; how, if one wants strawberries, one does n't buy early asparagus the same day, since the allotted amount for a meal must not be exceeded, and she is so interested! 'If one keeps house this way,' she says, 'there's some fun in it; it's a sort of game. We just order

by telephone, you know, and father pays the monthly bills.'"

"Yes, indeed, ordering by telephone, that's typical!" M. Ravignac threw up his hands expressively. "And the poor child has no idea what she ought to spend, having, if you'll believe me, no knowledge of the family resources, one day reproached for extravagance, the next day called miserly."

"A contrast, indeed," remarked M. Jacques more seriously, "to our childish share in the financial responsibilities of the household. Do you remember, *ma sœur*," he said, with a reflective smile, "how enchanted we were to work out the possibility of a journey to the Cévennes, the year you made your début? After all, life is more amusing when lived with an eye on its central facts."

"Of course," ejaculated Monsieur, "with apologies to you, Mademoiselle,"—he turned to me,—"for I know I can speak as I should to a friend of our nation; most of your countrywomen treat the universe as a playground. With their journeys, and their bookbinding, and their metal-working, and their frocks, and their sketching, and their lectures, and their '*beaux*'! Far be

it from me to refuse woman a place in the arts, or even in the learned professions, if she has the requisite earnestness of purpose and a real talent — though, of course, for her nothing can take the place of marriage," he was constrained to add. "But I can't see that most of our young friends have any end in view but activity itself. And what permanent satisfaction, I ask you," he ended rhetorically, brushing the crumbs off his knees as he rose with flashing eyes from the table, "do they get out of an existence which is nothing but one long picnic? A fine example for my daughters!"

This sounded ominous: yet the news of Alice White with which I was greeted several months later, on my arrival at la Sapinière — the estate so often vaunted in Paris for its homely *sauvagerie* on its hill-top above the rich vineyard land of Burgundy — was of a reassuring nature. Alice had written from America of her engagement to one of the admirers. "The young man who paints, a thoroughly nice fellow," Madame joyously announced.

It was Alice again who made the climax to the charming last afternoon of my visit. We had all

been, as usual, for a long ramble on the *montagne* — the *montagne* was a rocky ridge that stretched back into wilder country behind the farm, and its furze-grown open spaces, and its adventurous herb-like tang always led us farther than we planned. When we turned back, at last, toward the plain and the sunset, the rich Burgundian scene again spread out for our eyes, a sense of wide peace was in the air. The children wandered off to hunt rabbits in brushy tangles marked "*chasse réservée*," and I, too, followed my own way. But as I finally emerged on the slope that led precipitously down to the walls which sheltered the white house and vines of la Sapinière, I came upon my host and hostess, sitting together on a flat rock, with the sunset light in their faces.

"We were talking of dear Alice and her happiness," said Mme. Ravignac in a moved voice, making room for me beside her.

"*Ce n'est pas grand' chose, un mari, Mademoiselle*," said Monsieur — his rare jokes were always a sign of emotion — "*mais c'est, je crois, ce qu'on a trouvé de mieux jusqu'ici.* A husband does n't amount to much, but he 's probably the best invention that 's been made up to now."

"Alice declares," Mme. Ravignac hesitated, "that it is all my doing. Of course, that's nonsense, but if I've been able to show her what makes life worth living —" and she looked up toward her four, who were slowly ambling over the ridge in our direction, down toward the farm, and then again cherishingly to her husband, whose face held the same transfigured sense of mercies too deep for speech, yet counted to the utmost.

> *"Heureux qui, comme Ulysse, a fait un beau voyage,*
> *Ou comme cestuy là qui conquit la toison,*
> *Et puis est retourné, plein d'usage et raison,*
> *Vivre entre ses parents le reste de son age!"*

quoted M. Ravignac. But there he stopped, and the images of the unclassified activities and the still less classified admirers seemed to pass before his eyes. "'*Plein d'usage et raison*'? '*Vivre entre ses parents le reste de son age*'?" he queried. "I wonder, I wonder!"

"Come along, everybody," cried Madame gayly. "*Dépêchez-vous donc, les petits*," she called to the children. "Look, the chimney is smoking away. That means baths and bedtime, and I must hurry to see that Marie puts the chicken into the oven when she should."

M. Ravignac must neverthelsss have continued to "wonder" as he watched the bewildering activities of the picnickers, and the long and the short of his conclusions is that the idolized house which Madame's father built above the Seine must go. Bricks and mortar are transitory, after all. The real inheritance for grandchildren and children is a point of view and a standard; standards are worth the sacrifice of frail personal attachments — the Ravignacs probably reasoned something after this fashion, and I believe that their act of allegiance to a transcendent "system" will raise them above idle regret.

···· III ····

Mimi up to Date

One evening in the late spring I was sitting on the bench of the raised stern platform of a river-boat that was steaming in the sunset light down the Seine. Before us the Trocadéro rose purple against the yellow sky, with a glorified pictorial effect that its ugliness can never claim in the daylight; on the opposite shore the Eiffel Tower lifted its black mechanical traceries into the pale upper blue. Behind us the old gray bridges and towers of the past were shining out of the dim evening haze. The guard went about the decks, jingling his bag of small brass tickets and exchanging them for the sous of the passengers. The boat slid every few minutes, with a bang, to a landing-place by a bridge, discharged one little jostling crowd, took on another, and then spurted quickly off again.

The three who had chosen the stern with me got on at the bridge of la Concorde. The two young girls, I gathered from their talk and the unmistakable "air" of their perfectly simple

clothes, were apprentices at one of the great dressmakers' on the rue de la Paix. They had been followed to their bench by a dapper young man — boy, I should call him but for the look of weary decadence that the Parisian face assumes, long before twenty, when its lines are cast in certain places. He had small, sharp eyes, well-oiled black hair, and cheaply smart clothes that smelled of musk. He was on his way to Issy-les-Moulineaux, where the aeroplanes race, and seemed to be a clerk of some sort who went the rounds of the dressmakers with samples. When I began to observe the group, he was telling the elder girl that he had seen her "in the stock-room" that morning.

"You were getting a yard of mauve crêpe," he said. "Did n't you see me? I noticed your blouse immediately. *Chic*, that!"

His ferret eyes stared her in the face over his jaunty little cane, and passed appraisingly from the buff blouse over her whole person.

At this, the younger girl, who could not have been more than sixteen and was shy and softly innocent, gave her friend a quick, troubled glance. The friend was a year or two older, and had a small, seductive face that might one day

grow hard. She listened to the compliment with the ironic little smiling manner of one who knows her world, and threw a reassuring look to her companion. "I can take care of myself. Listen, and you'll soon learn how to manage them," she seemed to say.

"You think so, Monsieur? Do you really like it?" she encouraged very prettily.

"Yes, *parbleu!* What do you call that model — the 'Madeleine,' is n't it?"

He spoke as one possessed of all the secrets of the sanctuary. She quickly brought him low.

"The 'Madeleine'! Pray, who would wear a three months' old model? This is our latest; one of Mme. Jeanne's." She knew that he knew that she had made the blouse herself, out of a remnant from a bargain counter. But she also savored his appreciation of the *chic* that was hers by inheritance and acquisition — a *chic* that no Anglo-Saxon customer of her establishment could ever buy.

"It suits your coquette type," the young man began again, pulling the waxed ends of his mustache and fixing his eyes on hers. "Women should always dress for their type."

"Monsieur knows a great deal about women."

"I should be glad to know more about you, Mlle. Marie."

"Ah, I don't take up with the first comer, not I."

Having fairly caught her fish, she turned her slim back and entered upon an impassioned discussion of "skirts" with her blushing friend. The young man, touched at last, edged nearer.

"Mademoiselle!" His tone was humble, and she turned her head slightly.

"You're ravishing! Won't you — consider me?"

"Thank you for nothing, Monsieur. We're very happy as we are; are n't we, Marguerite?"

"But," anxiously, "you have n't already a *petit amoureux?*"

"Naturally!" — with bravado.

"You don't want to change?" he asked, low and eagerly. "Think of it." He was really in earnest now.

"Thanks. The present one suits me very well. I'm quite content as I am. Is n't that so, Marguerite?"

She got up, nodded with a semblance of insolent carelessness, and, taking Marguerite's arm, walked to the gangplank. The boat stopped at

Passy, and they hurried off. I looked back and saw them making their way quickly along the *quai* toward a row of poor white houses, where they doubtless lived honestly and frugally in an attic room together. But how long could it last? I saw my question reflected in the young man's face. He, too, was following the girls with his eyes, and, like the bird of prey he was, noting the direction they had taken. He chewed the end of his cigarette, tapped his cane on the floor, and gave an occasional half-angry, half-admiring exclamation:—

"Humph! satisfied! satisfied! There's a cheeky one for you!" he muttered to himself, screwing up his white eyelids and puffing smoke from his lips. But his small black eyes gleamed.

When the boat drew in to the next station, he was in the line of stragglers who handed in their brass tickets and stepped ashore, and I saw him turn back toward Passy, regardless of the aeroplanes. His furtive air suggested that, first of all, he was going to find out the truth about that imaginary little lover of hers.

It is from scenes like this that the stranger concludes — and not entirely without reason — that the young Paris working-girl of to-day is the

direct descendant of Mimi Pinson, of whom Alfred de Musset drew so immortal a portrait: Mimi of the charmed fingers, light-headed, light-hearted, living from hand to mouth; Mimi of the round face, the turn-up nose, and the sparkling black eyes, who plied her needle all day for small recompense, but was not averse to making merry at night with bohemian students: —

Mimi Pinson est une blonde,
Une blonde que l'on connaît.
Elle n'a qu'une robe au monde,
Landerirette!
Et qu'un bonnet.

Art and literature have liked to perpetuate the tradition. What is Charpentier's "Louise" but a modern version of the same young woman? Louise wears a hat, to be sure, instead of a little white cap, but in other respects times have n't changed much since 1840, we say to ourselves, as we see her in her giddy dressmaker's shop, and at last, rebelling against the parental onion soup, carried away on a wave of intoxication to seek joy of life with artists in Montmartre.

When one visits, as I did last year, the establishments of the great dressmakers and the milliners in the neighborhood of the rue de la Paix, a

Mimi-Louise seems the inevitable flower of the artificial soil in which she grows. This world of the *mêtiers de luxe* — the gilt-edged trades, one might call them, which minister only to luxurious tastes and large bank-accounts — is a world apart; a world, moreover, of striking contrasts. On one side of a door all is splendid glitter and a suave, extravagant ease that sounds in the smooth voices of the saleswomen, in the rustle and trail of the frocks displayed by the *mannequins*, in the chink of the bottomless pockets of the millionaires. On the other side of the door, dingy back stairs, bare corridors, crowded confused workrooms, an atmosphere tense with effort and frenzied haste. The forewoman from a raised platform drives the needles forward with quick, sharp gestures and watchful eyes. "A little more care with that cuff, Marguerite." "You're slow, Alphonsine; hurry up a bit there, my little girl!" She knows to a sou what every girl is worth and how far she may be goaded. The only standard common to both sides of the door is that of the Parisian secret, the *cachet Parisien*. Its form changes, subtly or fantastically, from week to week; its value never changes but to increase. The girl of the cleverest fingers, however, thinks herself lucky if her *mêtier*

de luxe gives her three or four, or at most five, francs a day.

Yet from these very workrooms and from those of the region to the eastward of "the center" — the region of wholesale houses, of flower and feather shops, which, in proportion as it stretches out towards the suburbs, declines in standards of workmanship and wages — from these countless *ateliers*, as I discovered, trudge home at night to their humble rooms, not only the light-headed grisettes, but girls whose hearts are burning with an ardor for social regeneration as keen as that felt by any Russian Jewess or any English factory hand; and gentle souls of another stamp, who live out their days in the glow of a sort of romance that no *petit amoureux* has ever known how to kindle.

At the Café du Sillon from Justine and Henriette, at the Bourse du Travail from Mlle. Marcelle, and from a milliner called Marie-Constance, I learned something about the life and outlook of the "serious" Paris working-girl.

Marie-Constance illustrated for me just how hard it is for a girl of fastidious taste to exist alone on five francs a day. She considered it impossible, indeed; that is why she trimmed hats in the evening on her own account.

Our first meeting occurred, characteristically, after ten o'clock, one October night. Hearing a timid knock at my door, I looked out, and found her standing in the corridor, where the lights were turned low. I could see nothing at first but an enormous scooping hat-brim. It was as if the hat's owner, with a kind of inverted ostrich instinct, sought to hide away under its smart roll her beseeching dark eyes, her shabbily modest figure, and the bulging yellow-paper bags with which she was laden.

"Ah, pardon. Mademoiselle was retiring?" She seemed all ready, timidly and silently, to vanish into the gloom, and I almost put a hand on her arm to hold her back. She was the modiste whom my friend Mme. Bury had sent. "But if it were too late for Mademoiselle?" Her voice was as frail and thinly sweet as her little face.

As she came in and sat down in a tired heap on the couch to open her bags, I said that if lateness were in question she was the person to be considered. She hastened eagerly to explain away her obvious weariness. There was no resisting the radiant appeal of those soft dark eyes.

"It was her busiest season, that was it," for she was trimmer at a milliner's who "created"

the models for the rue de la Paix. Having worked through the summer on the winter's models, they were now beginning "on the spring." It was just a little fatiguing to think in straw in October. Every night her forewoman said, as she bade them good-night, "Ideas, ideas, young ladies!" One really had to lie awake, for one could n't let the other trimmers get ahead of one. And then there were her private patrons for evening work — ladies like Mademoiselle's charming friend, Mme. Bury. "And if Mademoiselle would say what sort of hat she wanted?"

That was our first meeting, but the slim, black drooping figure, with the big, modish hat, the paper bags, that had odd protuberances to fit a feather or a bow, and the Bazin novel — she always read on the "Métro," she told me, and Bazin was her favorite novelist — was soon a familiar presence in the house, and to be seen gliding through the court and up the stairs in the early morning, at noon, or in the late evening. She worked in the *atelier* from nine until seven, and therefore must visit her own ladies in the scraps of time that remained. Yet she would come again and again for a single hat. The difficulty was to make her spare herself at all. Her artist's soul was

no respecter of her bodily needs; hers was a real cult of service and of perfection.

Even the *concierge*, suspicious of everybody, and, above all, unfriendly toward those late-comers or late-goers who forced her to pull the door-rope from the bed where she was always comfortably snoring after ten o'clock — even Mme. Lise referred to her affectionately as "that nimble, silent little fairy." "Your little fairy of a modiste is waiting for you," she would call to me from her lodge as I went up the stairs.

Léonie, the chambermaid, too, — Léonie was a woman of the South, and in general conscious, in the presence of these Parisians, of her thick waist and her clumsy fingers, — found pretty ways of describing her: "She's so dainty, Mademoiselle, like some little flower." This native, flower-like refinement, which in the Paris working-girl is so often touched with corruption, was in Marie tempered with nothing more urbane than an exquisitely courteous formality which seemed to deny herself the right to a personal existence.

If she were very late, for example, she was "heartbroken to keep Mademoiselle up; but I was at Mme. Bury's, on the boulevard Saint-Germain. I waited, indeed, from eight to ten, but

she was dining, and I could n't dream of disturbing her — a lady so distinguished in all her person, and so kind." On rainy nights, when she came in dripping, without an umbrella, her fears were all for my carpet: "I? Why, my big hat makes my umbrella — a little creature like me!" And, though her long journeys from one end of Paris to the other were made without a morsel of food, I could not induce her to take so much as a glass of milk. Patrons were patrons, and, if American ladies did not know what was suitable (I was made to feel), no customer of hers should ever see her milliner eat.

"I have told Mademoiselle," she said, bending a bow over my eye, "that I always make my little dinner when I get to my room. An omelet, or something like that. It suits me perfectly, this arrangement. I am never hungry till midnight. After my dinner I am refreshed; I dash off my customers' hats in no time. I need little sleep, and I assure Mademoiselle that I am never late or tired at the *atelier*. M. Louis winks at my copying his models, just because I am so prompt at nine o'clock, and come with courage in my heart and imagination in my fingers."

M. Louis was a thoroughly satisfactory em-

ployer. At Louis's what you needed was a *flair* of a special sort; the *flair* to foresee through the mists of autumn the forms and colors that would take shape on worldly heads in the spring, and in the spring and summer to forget the green leaves and "think," in turn, "in velvet." The best, the most intoxicating materials, were at your disposal: old lace, silky plumes and flowers. Marie's love of beauty and elegance here found their reward, it was clear, and every fibre in her being responded to the subtleties of tone and texture in which she worked.

There was no dull season at Louis's, either. That was another advantage, for most milliners had only half a year's work. And if, like all steady work, hers did not pay well, there were her own ladies besides, many of them as charming to make hats for as those one saw at the "five o'clocks."

"The 'five o'clocks'?" I asked.

"Ah, did n't Mademoiselle know? Twice a month we trimmers go with our *première*, a most elegant person, to make a round of the tea-rooms where society assembles. We go — wearing hats that M. Louis lends us, of course — to observe, to get our ideas stimulated."

If Marie lacked anything, it was not ideas. She conceived them and carried them to their logical conclusion with a doctrinaire rigidity that could not have been surpassed at the Sorbonne. I shall never forget the horror with which she discovered that I was wearing a straw hat in October — "Straw at this season!" — she almost gave me up on the spot; or her scornful appraisement of some old hats for which I had a liking. One was pure *camelote* (ready-made), the other was simply not worn. I might take it from her that in the right places it never had been. I was not, however, to get the whole savor of her blend of the doctrinaire and the romantic until the evening when she brought me my "small hat."

"Mlle. Marie! Is that what you call a *small* hat?"

The peaked Gothic extinguisher with curving sweet-pea sides that she had proudly taken from the dejected bag made me gasp. Marie's sensitive little face stiffened with a sudden authority, and her voice rang out hard and clear.

"But yes, Mademoiselle. *Of course* it is a small hat. As I explained, there are only two kinds of hats this year — the large and the small. This is the best model of the *petit chapeau*, the greatest success of our house this season."

I wondered, weakly, whether it could not be modified a little to suit a New England nose.

"Mademoiselle may mock all she likes, but I cannot suppose she really wants a modification," said Marie-Constance, very distantly. And I realized that she was thinking to herself that it would be far more fitting to change a mere nose than to make a poor compromise with perfection.

As I continued to look doubtfully in the mirror, I became conscious at last of the small shadow face reflected behind my own. The pale image, all sharpened and wan, that stared there, indomitably, at the creation of its night vigils gave me a sudden pang. It was inconceivable that so frail and dainty a creature should be leading this hard, this implacable life. I could not help asking her why she had chosen to be a milliner.

"But it's a beautiful trade, Mademoiselle — an artist's calling!" she cried, sparkling and revived again, and heart and soul for her work, as every Frenchwoman is. "And then, you see, I could not live at home, in the provinces."

Little by little her story came out. Her mother was a widow, the principal of a primary school. Her elder sister was a real "intellectual" who had taken scholarly honors and taught in a girls'

lycée. Marie was not of the intellectual type, and her mother had expected to marry her off at seventeen to an adoring cousin. He was a good sort, her cousin Henry, rich enough, and — oh, well, very likely he had all the virtues. It was a tragic situation, because her mother had a disease of the heart, and might die of the least overexcitement.

"My presence excited her, this poor *maman*, when I refused to marry. So I just had to come away," she ended, as if it were the simplest thing in the world.

"Ah, Mademoiselle, I could n't marry a man for whom I had only respect. I could n't. *Il me faut une âme sœur*, I must have a twin soul," she added, very shyly, but with a sort of touching tenderness in her voice and eyes.

Remembering the Bazin novels, I reluctantly suggested that true affinities were n't too easy to find in real life.

"Ah, yes, Mademoiselle, I think — one finds them" — she hesitated, and then, taking a sudden resolution: "You won't laugh, like my Parisian comrades? Say what you will, romance is truth! Well, then, I *have* found one. He is an intellectual, too, just graduated from the École Normale, and now he has his military service to do before he can

get his professorship. So, though I am twenty-seven, I must live my little hard-working life for a long time yet."

"Twenty-seven? But you look nearer seventeen!" I exclaimed.

"Mademoiselle flatters me," answered Marie, resuming her workaday formality again, as she began to gather up her sewing-materials. "I look my full age; nobody knows it better than I. But, *mon Dieu*, one must have courage. See what a beautiful hat I've given you, Mademoiselle! You will have many compliments for it in America. Good-evening, Mademoiselle."

She vanished through the door, and I was left to reconcile myself to an unmodified Gothic hat.

That was the only time she spoke directly of her love affair, and I felt, in her shy manner, with an increased confidence, an appeal to me not to reopen a sacred subject. She could not afford to stop to think of love, poor girl, as the season advanced and the search for ideas became more frenzied. All sorts of ideas were needed: those that should crown the heads of the newly rich automobile people — "'the New York type,' we call it," explained Marie; then there was the elusive, the delicately decorative, to be expressed for

ladies who cared for details of elegance; and the stiff tailor-made type, and much besides.

One Sunday morning, just before I left Paris, she came to bring her bill. It was absurdly small. I could not persuade her to take one extra sou. She accepted eagerly, however, some tattered novels. The bundle was heavy, and, as I was driving in her direction, I induced her to break the conventions as she understood them and go with me in my cab to the *quais*. When we separated, I happened to say that I was lunching with the family of one of her beloved novelists — one of those who believed in "romance." Her quiver of excitement was instantly suppressed. She merely murmured, "*Merci*, Mademoiselle, thank you for everything," and flitted silently away. But a few minutes later, from the salon window that opened to the river, I had a last glimpse of her. She was standing on the Pont-Neuf, staring at the house, and screened from observation, as she supposed, by the moving stream of carriages and wayfarers that flowed past her over the bridge. But I could see how, from under her hat-brim, and weighed down with her humble bags and her novels, she was absorbing, drinking in, as it were, every detail of that old

façade. "To think in straw in October" had its painful moments; still, "say what you would, romance was truth" for Marie-Constance.

It was a very different sort of truth that the Bourse du Travail insisted on: here misery was truth, low wages were truth, and the greatest truth of all was that nobody had the right to lead a life that left out of account the difficulties of his fellows. Marie's shrinking fastidiousness, which took offense when she met so much as a group of working-girls walking arm in arm through the streets in their blouses, would have shriveled up, indeed, in this hardy, grim atmosphere where pink posters announce the latest strike, and the echo of voices declaiming resounds through the ugly passages. Any girl who goes to the Bourse du Travail — the headquarters furnished by the French Government to the labor unions, and fronting suggestively the place de la République, that old battle-ground of the social revolution — must hold impersonal ideas higher than romance.

Mlle. Marcelle, whom one found on Monday evenings in the tiny headquarters of the women flower-makers' union, was no friend to the men. She refused to have anything to do with the *syndicat mixte* of her trade, on the ground that

women were not yet sufficiently emancipated to hold their own in a mixed union. She was a plump little person, with a sleek round head and no angles: such a Frenchwoman as Degas liked to paint, in a tight-fitting black dress, looking out at the world with competence and self-satisfaction. You might have mistaken her for a home-worker — one of those women whose years revolve within the narrow confines of one small household, one small, perfect bit of work. Mlle. Marcelle, though she had not chosen to marry, had shown herself a mother at heart by adopting a child. She had extended her love of good work and good housekeeping to the dirty corners of her trade — one family, after all, when seen "in the large," as she said; and, though she obviously mistrusted almost every one but herself, she had a firm and matter-of-fact faith in the Socialist State.

She was suspicious, for example, of "the intellectuals": the women of the thinking classes, who in France, as elsewhere, are beginning to be preoccupied with social problems. If she was gracious to me, it was, I believe, because I came from a land where the torch of liberty is supposed to be held aloft.

"Oh, yes," she assured me, "I know how they talk, these ladies. We have a comrade of the Typists' Union who is employed at the Ministère du Travail. She gives us reports. They go in, these ladies, to the Director, and they say to him, — Mlle. Marcelle pinched her lips and spoke in a mincing voice, — "'Dear Monsieur, help us to raise up this poor working-girl, who can never, without our help, lift herself above her troubles.'" Mlle. Marcelle's mouth tightened into a small, hard circle. "Ah, I tell you, I want no help except what the State owes me and what my comrades can give."

She would not accept help from "these ladies," for fear of patronage, even when the coöperative flower-making shop into which she had put her whole heart, and the savings of ten incredibly economical years, was in difficulties. It was to the dignified corridors and the high-ceiled rooms of the Labor Office, in its archbishop's palace on the rue de Varenne, that she had gone, before launching her undertaking, to ask for a subsidy. That the subsidy was accorded did not surprise Mlle. Marcelle; it was a matter of course that the State should help the workers. And when her coöperative venture seemed on the point of

failure, she wrote to a well-known Socialist editor and Deputy.

"Of course I got no answer from *him*," she said, "in spite of his promises in his newspaper, just because I'm not a voter. Perfectly natural! Why, even my *concierge*, a woman altogether limited, would be interested in social questions if she had a vote. 'The day I can vote, Mademoiselle,' she says to me, 'that day I will join a union.'"

Because she herself believed so firmly in the ideals of socialism and the power of women to stand on their own feet, the failure of the Coöperative Shop had been the bitterest experience of Mlle. Marcelle's thirty-eight years. The twenty years of her *fleuriste's* existence had been consecrated to this plan. She had worked in every sort of factory, in every grade of flowers, that she might learn all the details of her trade in their largest industrial bearing. The cult of her profession was strong in Mlle. Marcelle, too, and she raged against the increased use of machinery, and all the dismal results of commercialized standards. For years, after her working-day, she had taught an evening class in order to train young girls in the traditional secrets of flower-making. The union had been another of her efforts, and at last

to the "Coöperative" she had given her very life's blood. And, after all, because of jealousies, disagreements, impatiences on the part of the comrades, the experiment had flamed into ashes.

Mlle. Marcelle had then swallowed her disappointment and gone back to work in an *atelier* like anybody else. She was no dreamer, but one of those obstinately practical people whose courage is inexhaustible. When I went to see her in her own room, I realized that her propagandist spirit had now found a new center and dear hope; she was arming her little girl to do in the future the great deeds that she herself, in a blind age, had not been able to achieve. The child was an orphan whom nobody had wanted. Mlle. Marcelle had not hesitated to adopt her on an income of five francs a day — she earned a little less in the dull season, she said, a little more in the good season. Marie-Constance thought it impossible for one person to exist alone on five francs in Paris. Mlle. Marcelle's stoic virtues and her economic genius were such that she and the child were able with this sum to live very pleasantly in a clean, airy room in the center of the wholesale district.

She sometimes worked at home there, for a while, so that little Juliette might see, very young,

what beautiful flowers were like. Apprentices had not half a chance now in the *mêtier*, she said.

"If I can make this little girl, first of all, an excellent *fleuriste*, and then send her out to spread the propaganda among her comrades, I shall perhaps do as much for my kind and my trade as if my Coöperative had succeeded," she said, looking fondly at Juliette, who was at that moment eating a large bowl of strawberries. "Do not put your elbow on the table, my child," she interrupted. I had found them at lunch; and Juliette's piquant face, the face of a potential Mimi Pinson, had registered a vivid interest in our conversation.

"Listen, *Maman*," she now broke in, mischievously. "I need a new hair-ribbon for Sunday."

"Good Heavens," whispered Mlle. Marcelle, as she followed me to the door, "suppose she should turn out a little coquette, like the others!"

"A coquette, like the rest of them" — how often I heard that phrase! The men at the Bourse were always telling one, with a grin, that the Paris working-girl cared more for her mirror than for progress. Justine said that she would have been "as light-headed as the rest" but for the Sillon.

The Sillon was a Catholic organization, later condemned by the Pope for its preoccupation with social reform, and the atmosphere at the little restaurant behind Saint-Sulpice was quite unlike that of the Bourse. There the spirit of one class, asking for revenge on all the others, had seemed to dominate. The minute you went into this funny little place, where the napkins of the *habitués* were in numbered pigeonholes by the door, and the sanded floor was as clean as the bare tables, you felt, on the other hand, in the presence of the actual fact of fraternity. The men and women who haunted the Café du Sillon appeared to hold their ideals in common, though some of them worked with their hands and others with their heads.

It was an art critic who introduced me to Justine. Remembering how the joyous consecration of her bearing struck me that night when she pushed open the low door, and crossed the room, smiling, to sit beside us, I realize that my first impression of her was the true one. Her eyes were very blue, and had the inspired, mystic look of those who, from some desert land, spy on a dim horizon a sail of blessed hope. Though the depth of human misery had been revealed to her, she

seemed to have had, at the same time, a vision of redemption. She was extraordinarily pretty, and wore her old clothes and her rusty black taffeta hat with the same inborn ease that gave her manner its charm. She made one at home in the café very much as if she were a great lady doing the honors of her own table.

Justine was as deeply concerned as Mlle. Marcelle with the theory of socialism, the pains of the toilers, and the necessity of organization as a protective armor for women, but in a less practical, a more exalted way. She lived with girl students and read Marx far into the night. The Sillon had persuaded her that she was a creature with a mission, and she felt this all the more because of the discouragement that she met everywhere else. Her family told her that she was a fool for her pains; her comrades laughed, and, of course, employers were ill-disposed, if they heard of her propaganda.

"My good fortune," she explained, "is in looking pretty and vain like the others. And then I am as nice as can be to everybody; they all adore me! — the ladies of the firm, too. I help the girls with their little blouses while we wait for our work, and gradually I get my influence."

Justine's talk of the *ateliers* — she, too, was a *fleuriste* — and the sense that she seemed to have of her own phenomenal courage brought out very strikingly the defenseless position of the girl who works in an *atelier* in Paris. Every one knows the assurance of the woman of the small tradesman class, who is not only her husband's partner at the café desk or behind the counter, but usually the better man of the two. The women who follow the rougher sorts of trades, the market gardeners, the street venders of vegetables, and the rest, certainly fear no human being, not even a police officer. The home workers, for their part, though their obscurity makes them fair game for the exploiting contractor, are intrenched behind the respectable ramparts of their home. But girls like Justine, whose hours and working conditions are carefully protected by law, walk, nevertheless, in terror of their forewoman or their *patron*, and — is it because custom has decreed that the unmarried have no influence in France? — dare not lift their voices in protest. Very few of them are organized in labor unions.

"Think of it!" said Justine, leaning across the table; "two months ago I was working in a shop; the piece rates declined so that we did not make

two francs a day. Fifteen of us left together, but I was the only one who had the courage to say, when the *patronne* asked why, 'Because I do not earn my living here, Madame.' I spoke very politely, you may be sure, but how furious she was!" Justine shivered. If she ever did succeed in persuading the girls to ask for better pay, she was always ill afterwards, from terror and excitement.

Mme. Marcelle did not dream of concealing her trade-union sympathies, and maintained that they had never injured her professionally. A good worker, she said, was always welcome. Justine was haunted by the fear that her strong-mindedness would lower her earning capacity. She was a first-rate *fleuriste*, but she had never been able to support herself entirely, without some assistance from her parents. She respected Mlle. Marcelle, though she disliked her violent feminism — men should be treated as friends, not as enemies — and shrank from the anti-Christian spirit that prevailed at the Bourse. For all that, one felt in her, as in the other working-girls, a distrust of all authority — a hatred, on principle, of the *patron*. Justine and her friend Henriette, the feather-worker, had never permitted themselves, I am sure, a sneaking liking for an

employer. Theirs were the sentiments of the *papillons*, those small oblong stickers, with anything but a butterfly significance, that one finds on the backs of benches in the industrial parts of Paris. "The heart of a *patron* is a strong box," they read, and, "The thinner the workman, the fatter the employer." Justine even suspected the factory inspectress.

"I should like to get hold of that woman," said Henriette. Henriette's mother, who had been forewoman in a feather shop, was now dying of consumption, and she herself was evidently already under the influence of the disease. "I'd say some things to her. She comes in smiling, well dressed. She says: 'Good-morning, young ladies. Are the windows opened here? *Au revoir, mesdemoiselles.*' Why does n't she pitch into the *patron* in our presence if she really means business?"

Justine was willing to concede that before the abolition of night work — until recently it was permitted during the busy season in the *métiers de luxe* — the inspectress, who had to be on hand by night as well as by day, had to deal with a complex question. Women inspectors are in charge of women's work in France, except where there is

power machinery; and since Paris has few great factories or mills — since it is a town of so-called "small commerce," of innumerable small handiwork industries — inspection becomes a delicate matter.

"One is born sceptical in Paris," pleaded Justine, when I taxed her with injustice.

Where the *patron* or some other authority was not concerned she was, nevertheless, anything but sceptical. She would jump up from the most absorbing of her industrial discussions and run to speak a word of friendly gossip or sympathy with the people who went in and out of the café, and never forgot, I noticed, to bring a newspaper to the waitress. This hard-featured, middle-aged person, it seemed, lived for the continued novel at the bottom of the page, and in the intervals of passing dishes retired to a corner with the smudgy sheet glued to her near-sighted eyes.

"Well, Mademoiselle, what has happened to her now?" Justine would ask with an air of intense interest, when Louise set down her plate of *purée*.

"Ah, Mademoiselle, just fancy! she is beginning to doubt whether he really loves her!"

"Little fool!" Justine's happy laugh reminded

one — even though she herself never read anything less serious than Marx — of that inevitable Mimi, in whose heart bloomed "the white rose of gayety."

I wish that those who believe only in the Mimis of the river-boats might once look through the low door behind Saint-Sulpice, where Justine, with a consecrated hope shining in her blue eyes, leans across the table to expound the future to an adoring group of enthusiasts. I wish they might see Mlle. Marcelle, in her more matter-of-fact way, teaching her adopted Juliette to be a good *fleuriste* and stuffing her with strawberries and propaganda; I wish they knew Marie-Constance, who thinks boldly in straw and conceals romance under her hat-brim.

.... IV ....

The Other Side of the Door

MME. CLAUDE knocked, and persistently knocked again, as we stood in a dark but clean-swept corridor on the fourth floor of an old house in Montmartre. At last the door opened a few inches — not more than two. Through the crack we saw one bright eye, a sharp little nose, and a patch of thin old cheek, brown, and marked with deep, rusty furrows.

"*Bon jour, Madame.*"

"Good-morning" (very dubiously).

"You are a necktie-maker?"

No answer.

"I ask because we want to learn something about your trade," Mme. Claude went on, persuasively. "I am studying women's trades, in the hope, Madame, of being able to better them." She wound up rather lamely her appeal for information under the unblinking, the penetrating suspicion of that bright eye. A silence followed. We waited patiently.

"Mine is not a trade to grow rich on, Mesdames," came, after a long pause, in a tone of shrill decision through the crack.

"Of course not, Madame."

"All I can tell you, Mesdames, is this: what we are now, that we shall always remain"; and the door closed in our faces with a snap of finality. But we felt the eye piercing our backs, as through the keyhole it watched us — incomprehensible meddlers that we were — go down the stairs and out of sight.

"There you have our typical Frenchwoman," sighed Mme. Claude, "guarding her home like a dragon, living her own little life quite untouched by the lives of others. When shall we interest her in the common good?"

Mme. Claude, though she longed to emancipate the necktie-maker, was nevertheless loyal to the traditions of her race, and reproached herself for having failed to bring a letter of introduction. The *cravatière*, excellent woman, was protecting a real *foyer*, a home, a precious little segment of civilized life against intrusion. For in Paris the door of the workingman's lodging is as secret and proud a barrier to pass as that of the bourgeois' apartment. That is precisely why, when the

cañons of polite usage are observed — when, in short, she comes duly "recommended" — even an "intellectual" from across the sea may count on the door opening to her with a rare grace of welcome.

Indeed, in spite of our unfortunate first call, my sociological pilgrimages with Mme. Claude were full of delightful illuminations. We climbed the steep, Neapolitan-like steps of Montmartre; penetrated the courts of Belleville; found our crooked way about behind Notre Dame; jingled bells at garden gates in that flowery suburb called "the Lilacs"; and grew as used to dull Grenelle as to those "eastern" quarters of turbulent report whose great gray squares are named after the Republic and the Bastille. And if out of our pursuit of serious ends, our search for "facts" and "principles," the human and personal characteristics of the *ouvrière à domicile* (the home-worker) are what remain most vividly with me now, I can no longer fail to understand the extent to which the vast, bewildering edifice of modern Paris rests on her patient endeavor, or separate her from the world in which she lives. It is a world in which the bitterness of poverty is transformed by thrift and competence and cleanliness to a perfection of

simple living, and in which good work, well done, is the mainspring of life.

"*On aime bien son métier*" — one loves one's trade. As I think of those innumerable spotless homes to which we were admitted last year the words sound in my ears and seem to explain the distinctive characteristics of the home-worker. To Americans, brought up on the ready-made products of the factory system, the degree to which women's trades in Paris are still carried on in the homes of married women, rather than in workshops or factories, is a surprising revelation. A Frenchwoman of the people does not feel obliged to renounce her *métier* because she has assumed the duties of mother and housewife as well. On the contrary, it is customary for her to continue to practice in her own home the calling that before her marriage she has learned in some workroom of the central part of Paris. You wonder, perhaps, why this should be true of comfortable households as well as of poor ones; why in almost every case good work and good housekeeping should, moreover, go hand in hand. Then Madame says to you, with her little decorous smile, but in a voice that thrills with the ardor of creation, "One cares about one's trade." When work is given

this sacramental devotion, it is inevitable as hunger or sleep; under its benediction pots and pans and children's faces shine, and a mere embroidered initial or a flower-stem acquires, and seems somehow to demand of its surroundings, a quality of exquisite distinction.

The tidy homes and the trades that we saw going on in them were, however, as various as the women who seemed so capable in the management of both. We found the oddest contrasts under the same roof. In one of the decayed "great" houses of old Paris, for example, — you come upon them still in the queer, narrow streets near the place des Vosges, and know them by their fine façades and their echoing stone stairways for noblemen's palaces fallen upon evil days, — we discovered a *posticheuse* (worker in false hair), a corset-maker, and Mère Sophie living side by side.

Stalwart Mère Sophie, though she followed a trade that is peculiarly Parisian in flavor, — she gained her living in the markets, — was not, to be sure, of the same race as the shy *corsetière* and Mme. Becot, the *posticheuse*. To the corset-maker the welfare of society depended on the flexibility and firmness of her whalebones. Mme. Becot, while her clever hands moved over a half-

finished switch, gave us an inkling of her dexterous art and its connections with the race of coiffeurs: those little, black, oily men, she described them, who dress in frock-coats, smell horridly of perfume, and are, it seems, "difficult customers." Typical home-workers both, they marveled that Mère Sophie dared venture forth in the black hours before dawn to impose the strength of her muscular arm, her screaming lungs, and her whole abundant person on the crowd in the *halles* where she bought and sold her vegetables.

Mère Sophie was, however, exceedingly proud of her trade. All but a peasant herself, her mind ran on the pains of those who till the soil to raise vegetables for Paris tables. She painted for us the hard life of the market gardener, and the harder life of his wife and her servant. These slaves of Parisian epicures, she explained, work on their hands and knees in the garden twelve hours a day, and, after cooking a dinner for their men towards ten in the evening, pile their produce on a wagon, start for Paris, and, jogging drowsily through the streets just as the night-hawks and playgoers are tumbling into bed, unload their vegetables at the *halles* in the small hours. Mère Sophie pitied the market gardener's wife — her

own mother had been such a one — and considered that she had all the advantages of the occupation with less than half the labor. Her method was to drive a hard bargain with the sleepiest countrywoman she could find for an armful of beets and carrots, and then, evading the police — for she had no license — to sell them in the *halles* at a profit. Outside her door, which was approached by a small, steep stairway that opened unexpectedly to the sun, we saw her great muddy boots hung out to dry, and her wet petticoats, stained with the brown earth of her vegetables.

"Was n't her trade hard, exhausting?" we asked.

"I believe you," laughed Mère Sophie, who spoke the vulgar tongue, rubbing her huge hands over her calico knees, "especially to the voice. One never stops yelling." But what did that matter, if you liked it?

A no less ardent lover of her trade was Mme. Turc, the *lingère*, obliged, to her cost, to make petticoats for a wholesale merchant whose trade was in the American market.

"Look at that, Madame," she said, holding up a much-beruffled skirt. "*C'est de la camelote*, — it's cheap and shoddy stuff. I hate to have you

see me with such work in my hands. It gives me shivers in my back to take such big stitches in such flimsy cloth — I, who had three years' apprenticeship in lingerie with the Sisters, and was taught to make fine, solid garments. But what would you? It seems that the great ladies of N'York demand these things. What a funny country, America! But Mademoiselle is from Boston — of course that's different," she hastened to add, suddenly aware that she was failing in the tact of a hostess. She had to take what was given her, the good and the bad together, and the worst of it was that, under the influence of this unfortunate American demand — "No Frenchwoman who respects herself would put this on, Madame knows," she repeated, shaking the lace ruffles disdainfully again — flimsiness had begun to pay better than "solidity."

Mme. Turc had a grievance against America, and many of the other *lingères* had their legitimate grounds of complaint. For some of them earn no more than two sous an hour. The competition of the prisons and the convents and the provinces; the hard bargains of the middlewoman or contractor, who often acts as intermediary between shops and merchants and home-workers — all

these elements played their part, one was told, in the low rates that seemed to prevail in the lingerie and most of the other home trades. If starvation wages and subcontracting imply the "sweating system," this system undoubtedly exists in Paris. Yet nobody who is familiar with the degradation of home industries in New York or in the East End of London will venture to call the Parisian industries "sweated" in the same sense. Whatever her suffering — and it is too often great — the *ouvrière à domicile* has not lost her self-respect.

Indeed, from the composite picture that my several months' acquaintance with her stamped upon my memory, each round, intelligent face, bent over the busy, untiring hands, emerges for me cheerful, smiling; in any case, firm and courageous. Although these faces were not fixed on far horizons, one realized that they had taken in the universe and their own place in the scheme of things with a comprehensive and philosophic glance. They were, in fact, always taking it in, peeping out now and then, a little ironically and with no thought of change, from the modest niche into which they had resignedly settled themselves, even while they turned all

their patient attention to the details of every day.

Of the peaceful and resolute faces I like best to remember Mme. Girard's. Mme. Girard is an artificial flower-maker; and because she followed this most distinctive of the old Paris handicrafts for women, and, seeing and accepting the limits of her tiny life, made it within these limits a thing of beauty and significance, she stands out for me as the true type of the Paris working-woman of the old school. It is a type of which a nation may well be proud. Mme. Girard carried the fine French economy of living to its extreme expression. Let my compatriots who sum up Paris by the boulevards ask themselves whether we can find on our continent one woman who lives alone, happily and respectably, on sixty dollars a year.

Mme. Girard is, however, far more than respectable; she is "distinguished." She lives, not in a working-class district, where rents are low, but in the heart of the faubourg Saint-Germain. There are many such humble and industrious tenants of the houses of the rich in Paris. When one meets them on the stairs, neat, hurrying little figures laden with bundles, who salute one politely

with their bare heads or their white caps, one usually supposes them to be emissaries of the fine laundress or the dry-cleanser around the corner. If the truth were known, they may very likely be going to their own *chez soi*, a bit of a room at the end of some hidden, winding corridor.

In such a room, in a "great house" in the boulevard Saint-Germain, I found Mme. Girard making her moss-roses, which, like the room itself, had for her the charm of long usage and association. She was sixty-six years old, and had made exactly the same sort of roses, for the same manufacturer, day after day for fifty years. She sat forever in her window that looked out over high gray walls into a prim convent garden; a tiny black figure, shrunken, and busy as some little tireless ant at her never-ending task.

On the table before her one saw first a heap of delicate moss-roses — two roses and three buds on every stem, and every spray exactly like the next. From a quaint standard, with a potato at the top into which its wire stem was stuck, hung, head down, the half-finished rose on which she was working. The uncurled petals were spread out on the table; six dark petals, three "medium," three pale, and so on in regular succession. Mme.

Girard, heating her long-handled goffer in a glimmer of blue gas flame, pressed each heart-shaped bit of dark-pink muslin until it took the form of the curving outer petal of a rose, and then attached it with a touch of paste to her flower. The inner petals were crimped with the fingers; the secret of the *fleuriste's* art, as Mme. Girard explained, lay in the fingers themselves, especially in the swift and subtle rotary movement used for winding stems and shaping buds and petals. Yet Mme. Girard earned only one franc a day.

"Many people would call me an old fool to live here in this expensive room, for which I pay more than half my yearly earnings," she said. "But habit is too strong for me. Here I was happy with my husband; here I must live out my widowhood, so long as the good God pleases. I see the good Sisters telling their beads in the garden down there, and they are my company. 'Provided I can make my rent, and my soap,' I say to myself, as I curl my rose petals."

She considered herself very extravagant in the matter of soap, and indeed her floor and her walls fairly shone. Bare and small as it was, her room had something *pimpante* about it, a sort of grave, sweet bloom, like the moss-roses. One could have

believed that the bees themselves kept it immaculate, and that Madame's fingers, never resting, never hesitating, deft and sure and transparent, had no need of earthly nourishment.

Nevertheless Mme. Girard did eat; she told me the disposition of her yearly budget of three hundred francs. She spent three sous a day for bread, two for milk, two for white cheese. Two sous' worth of vegetables, and four of meat, made her a soup that provided several meals. Then there were twenty sous for coffee every month, eight sous a week for butter, and a few more for a little sugar and salt. That was the whole of her annual expenditure, except the rent and the soap, and such charcoal and petroleum for heat and light as were strictly necessary. As to her clothes, she "arranged," as she said. She went out only to market or to get her roses.

"It is n't a life for the young," said Mme. Girard; "but for me, I am used to it. I get on pretty well. I should be most unhappy if I did not have my little roses."

She was very eager that I should not consider her roses really good. They were perfect of their kind, no doubt, but it was such a modest kind! I should see the roses that skillful *fleuristes* copied

from fresh flowers — they were more beautiful than nature! A *fleuriste* who had the *cachet Parisien*, the true magic touch that Paris alone can give, and loved flowers enough, could make anything that grew; apprenticeship might then be said to last all one's life. She remembered very well how, in the workroom where she had her training, Madame the *patronne* used to bring roses in from her garden to be copied, and the dyer used to work with a ravishing rose in a glass of water before him. She, too, had once expected to stand high in the trade, but had married young, and had very naturally gone on working for the same employer afterward. This little moss-rose was the first model she had tried at home. She had succeeded with it, and it had been simpler to continue to make the same thing. With the husband and the two boys, she did n't have leisure to experiment upon any others; and by the time the children were grown she was quite too old to learn new ways. After that her husband had died, and her two sons had been killed in the army in Algeria. This only proved that a woman who had no trade was without security in life. It was a very stupid woman who could not manage her household and follow some trade as well. A little

more money did n't come amiss; and then one enjoyed it so, one's profession, concluded the old woman, raising her eyes for a moment to smile at me as she laid another spray on her heap of roses.

"But mine is n't a life for the young," she murmured sadly again, shaking her head with sober resignation.

Nothing stood out more clearly for American eyes, accustomed to seeing children working at their mother's side in home industries, than the fact that the really young in Paris have no share in these meticulous labors. Among the many family groups — mothers and daughters embroidering and flower-making together — that my own wanderings recall there was never a single child, even in the poorest homes. The children were always at school, or at play, or absorbed in their lessons. High standards have many valuable by-products; no child could possibly make the simplest types of flowers in Paris, even those that the trade sums up scornfully as *camelote*. French parents, moreover, have that gift so blessed to their children, the gift of the "long view."

I remember, as a case in point, one family that lived in extreme poverty in a little flat at the back of a court near the cemetery of Père-Lachaise,

almost opposite that famous pitiful wall where the Communards were shot. Very properly, the pretty mother's trade was here of a funereal order: she made those nightmare wreaths of colored bead flowers with which the good French Catholic likes to adorn the tomb of his departed. Six children under seven years old — a very large family for a Paris workingman — and a rheumatic grandmother had to be fed by a devoted pair of parents.

The father "was sure to earn his five francs a day"; but Madame's bead marguerites brought in very little, and when she was asked to make the wire frame of the wreath as well — the "carcass," as the French has it — "Ah, then it's nōt gay," put in the old grandmother, whose wrinkled face, brown as a walnut under its stiff white cap-strings, nodded with interest in our conversation from her warm corner by the stove. It was she who proudly led us, with her limping step, into the next room to see the two youngest babies asleep in their cribs; though there were but three rooms, every child had its own clean little bed. The three elder ones, in their black aprons, with their straps of books, the eldest, a round-faced little boy, leading his two round-faced little sis-

ters solemnly by the hand, soon came in from school. Madame exclaimed aloud, with astonished indignation, when I inquired — knowing how it would be in such a household in New York — whether the children never helped to string the beads.

"My little ones? Heavens, no!" If one were poor, that did not mean that one had a heart of stone. Children must go to school and then have their play. With a regular, hard-working life, one got on somehow. Here "everybody" was up at five o'clock; "everybody" was in bed by half-past seven. Sundays and holidays the same work, the same régime. Madame liked to make her wreaths — that was another pair of sleeves. A woman could not be the comrade, the true wife, of her husband, unless she, too, did her part.

Mme. Claude was amused when I tried to explain the next day why these sentiments, which are in France those of the average domestic woman, — the *femme d'intérieur*, — would pass as "emancipated" in America.

"So it is only the young girl who is free to work in your country" she said. International comparisons, we were agreed, bring out nothing so much as the fundamental unlikeness attached by

custom to the same terms in different lands. "But here," Mme. Claude continued, "we shall, I fear, see some one who, the world over, would be considered emancipated in the wrong sense."

We were climbing the narrow stairs of a four-story house in that blank and featureless region behind the Gare de Lyon. Mme. Claude confessed that she felt a little doubtful of our reception. The unmarried mothers who kept their children as long as this one had were no weaklings, and it was sometimes awkward to have to explain that her Welfare Committee could not take charge of the children unless it were given complete control of them for a certain number of years.

The young woman who opened the door to us was slim, and tall, and shabbily dressed. Her coarse black hair grew very thick about a handsome face, slightly disfigured by a scar on one cheek. She received us eagerly, warmly even, apologizing, however, for the appearance of things. Though it was eleven o'clock, the big mahogany bed which filled all of one side of the small dark room was unmade, covered with a disorderly heap of dingy bed-clothes. A tawdry wardrobe, with a mirror, occupied most of the

remaining wall space. But a stove, a table, and a sewing-machine were squeezed in somehow between the door and the window, and by the bed stood a washstand with bottles on it, and bits of soap, and a basin of dirty water.

The woman, with a regretful look in this direction, explained that she was just getting ready to go for "her garters." Yes, she worked for a wholesale house in the rue Réamur, stitching garters on her sewing-machine. She had to walk all the way and back again; at six sous the dozen pair a car-fare was n't to be thought of. If she could only be sure of work when she got there, she would n't complain; it all depended on whether or not any orders arrived in the morning post. If there were none, she returned as she had come. On the other hand, she might get as much as three francs' worth, and have to sit up all night. This was quite too rare, however, since four other women, very much "recommended," had become her rivals. Though she had worked for the firm for eight years, they now got the preference because they brought little presents to the forewoman — a bouquet of roses, some chocolate. They were all married; they wanted only pin money, anyhow. Nevertheless, even if she could

afford it, *she* would n't flatter the forewoman; she was too proud, too independent. "*Chacun sa liberté* — freedom for everybody!" She stood with her back to the window, one hand on her hip, and her dark head, boldly outlined against the oblong panel of light, stood out for us with an almost defiant grace.

Her little girl? The harsh, declamatory tone changed at once, and she told us how the poor little thing was ill of bronchitis in hospital. Mme. Claude set forth very sympathetically the purpose of her committee, and the advantages it offered a hard-working mother to bring up her child with honest farmer-folk.

Ah, yes, it was doubtless true, as Madame said, that the child needed country air. But what would you? She could n't give her up. She had n't lived for that little one, starved for her, slaved for her, during six long years, only to lose her now. The father had deserted her — she was exactly twenty then — because she refused to get rid of the baby. Men were like that; selfish, brutal creatures. But it gave one courage to see how the child adored her mamma. It was mamma here, mamma there, and when one wanted to send her to school nothing but sobs: "I want to stay with

you, I want to stay with my *maman!*" It was evident that she would grow up a dunce unless measures were taken; so — Madame would be glad to hear — she had arranged to put her out to board at a school where the poor mothers might visit their little girls occasionally. The price was fifteen francs a month — a heavy charge when added to two hundred and fifty francs for the yearly rent. And earnings anywhere between three and ten francs a week!

"But there, ladies! I prefer to live on vegetables and water and see the child now and then. *Chacun sa liberté!*"

Mme. Claude, evidently considering the school better than nothing, suggested that with some other work to replace these irregular "garters" the child's tuition might be assured; there was domestic service, or factory work. But the girl shook her head. In the factory one's extra money went for lunches, for clothes. She liked better to work at home. In service one was too much held down. "*Chacun sa liberté!*"

"What happens, then," said Mme. Claude, forced into frankness by the visions conjured up in that squalid room, "what happens, then, when you do not 'make your week'?"

"Ah, now you're getting there, Madame. You know what the Paris employer says to such as I when we complain: 'Well, you're free, are n't you?' We are free, yes!" She gave a sudden bitter laugh. "When I don't make my week, there's always one remedy."

In a moment she was smiling and chattering again of her child. She wished us a cordial good-bye, standing at the door, one hand on her hip, her head flung high, and calling after us: "The ladies understood, bore no ill-will? Madame might be tranquil about the child. *Chacun sa liberté!*"

"Liberty, liberty," sighed Mme. Claude, as we went away haunted by that unhappy cry. "What, then, of fraternity, one's duty to one's neighbor? The man was free to leave the mother, the employer is free to grind her down. But hers is the most sad freedom of all. What that child must already have seen! I am the one whose hands are tied."

This was the only slovenly room that Mme. Claude and I saw, and the only woman whose work and whose life did not seem to rest on the firm foundation of some fixed ideal. They illustrated, as Mme. Claude said, the other side of the

shield: what work at home is likely to become, even in Paris, under the vulgarized demands of modern industry. While machines and "cheap stuff" are despised in France, this poor bit of wreckage on the great sea of labor will, however, remain far less representative of the Paris home-worker than the Mme. Girards — those effective women, so highly civilized within their narrow boundaries; those excellent mothers and housewives; those passionate lovers of their trades who, bent over the one small, patient task in which they have learned perfection, and hidden away in a cherished obscurity, still set the standard of beautiful handiwork for the world, behind their secret, fast-closed doors.

···· V ····

Utopia

"A *PNEUMATIQUE* for Mademoiselle," announced Margot, as she set down my breakfast tray. The fine literary handwriting of the address was intriguing in itself, and I hastily tore open the blue envelope: —

"*Mademoiselle*," it began, "only last night did I learn from our mutual friends the Gastons of your sociological studies, and I wish to offer you, before it shall be too late, the result of my own profound investigations of the problems in which you are interested. I might even ask why you have not yourself approached one of the few men in France capable of helping you with facts and figures? But I refrain from reproaches. I leave Paris to-night to prepare the way for a new venture in coöperative vine-growing which shall have none of the errors of the first — that famous failure at La Bolie of which you must have heard. Come to-day, then; come before eleven.

"Hopefully *votre serviteur*,

"ULYSSE TULLY."

Facts and figures? I was anxious enough to get them from any available source, but as I explored the semi-rural quarter beyond the Parc des Buttes-Chaumont for the street named in the *petit bleu*, I already felt considerable doubt of the value of my expedition. In the sober academic circles I frequented, the mention of M. Tully's coöperative experiments had always raised an enigmatic smile, and the phrase of a young sculptress had stuck in my mind: "Tully? *Mais, c'est un sylvain des bois!*" A faun? But the solid, working-class aspect of the house, when I found it, proved reassuring. As there was no *concierge* to be seen, I climbed four pairs of stairs, by instinct, to the top floor, and pulled the bell-rope at one of the doors that faced each other across the landing.

A slatternly *bonne*, answering my ring, shook her head doubtfully: "Madame is here," she said, "Monsieur over there — *ah, le voilà!*"

I turned to behold an extraordinary figure standing in the opposite door: a short, plump, and very round little figure, with a great deal of black beard and hair, enormous brown eyes, and a ruddy face that beamed content and simple goodness. This smiling personage might, indeed, if judged by the countenance alone, have been

taken for one of the excellent bourgeois vulgarians whom one sees enjoying the Bois with their children on Sunday afternoons. His dress, however, was anything but bourgeois. He wore a crimson velveteen coat, too tight in the seams; white duck trousers, — on a cold spring day, — too short in the legs; and his bare feet were thrust into brightly embroidered felt slippers. He gave one the impression of bursting out everywhere: his hairy neck and arms from his dingy shirt, his waist from the cord that held his clothes together at the belt, his ankles from the shrunken trousers.

"Pardon me, I think I must have come to the wrong apartment," I said hastily — for could this be a man who was expecting a strange young woman? — "I was looking for M. Tully, the authority on coöperation — "

"Come in, come in, *c'est bien moi*," replied the little man, bowing gallantly. "Mademoiselle," he continued with *empressement*, holding out a plump and dirty hand, "I should have known you anywhere for a true humanitarian, for one of those courageous young women who are to-day revolting against intolerable —"

I broke in upon his swelling period; but not at

all dashed, and shuffling cheerfully ahead of me down the passage in his flapping slippers, he exclaimed that he was enchanted to place himself, his notes, and his ideas at my disposal. With another deep bow, another joyous smile, he pointed to a chair, and sat down opposite me at his writing-table.

Piles of manuscript, closely written in his minute, flourishing script, were there spread out for the visitor's inspection. A chair had evidently been cleared by turning its contents on to the floor. But this minor disturbance could have contributed little to the general confusion. Dusty books and papers were knee-deep on every side; a violin, paint-boxes, a palette, a doll — these were a few of the accessories I noticed in the study of my sociological host. As my glance took in the crude force of some half-finished canvases that hung on the wall, and the charm of the open window that framed a square of clear spring sky, and a slender, shivering poplar tree, he leaned forward with another radiant smile.

"Ah, Mademoiselle!" he exclaimed intimately, "*merci, merci,* Mademoiselle! you notice my pictures, you appreciate my tree! That is to say your soul also loves nature and the arts. Mme.

Lys, my talented wife, painted those portraits. Talented — what do I say? — she is a woman of genius, *une femme tout à fait supérieure*, a true comrade in coöperation."

"Perhaps you will let me look at them after we have discussed your experiment," said I, trying to emphasize the purpose of my visit, but inwardly facing the immediate confirmation of my doubts. "I have, you know, been visiting some of the French coöperative societies —"

"*Ma chère demoiselle*," he again interrupted, with a rich and disarming expansiveness, "I already know far more than that! Suppose we leave out the preliminaries? There are those who pursue the social sciences in an abstract, pedantic manner, there are others who take them not only from the heart but *en artiste*. Admit that we both belong to the great dilettanti!"

Waiving admissions, I reminded M. Tully of La Bolie and asked the reasons for its failure: "Did the peasants —?"

But before I had finished my sentence, with abundant gestures and eloquent tongue he was pouring out a description of the psychological, lyrical, moral, physical, ethical, and sociological characteristics of his "Utopie des Vignes," as

he called it; yet it was impossible to get from him a clear idea of any single aspect, or, indeed to stick to the subject in hand. I have never seen a creature so deeply in earnest and yet so utterly inconsequent. In the midst of a minute description of the economic status of a typical family of *vignerons*, he remembered the song, the old French song, that he had sung in that household to the bedridden grandmother. "*Tenez*," he suddenly cried, and darting into the corner for his violin, played and sang the air, in a warm, stirring voice that almost brought tears to my eyes.

The song, moreover, suggested the old Roman bridge on which he had first heard its words, "thrilling out of the darkness of a summer evening," as he said. And the bridge, in turn, recalled the cathedral that stood in the square opposite the bridge. So he dropped his violin to hurry out a notebook, with delicate pencil sketches of the carved doorway of the cathedral, and behold! we were embarked upon a discussion of Romanesque and Gothic. With difficulty I got in a question about our typical family. "To be sure"—and Tully returned to the family with an enthusiasm that might have carried us far into economics if, as luck would have it, the eldest son of that

family had not been a poet. His verses, produced in manuscript after a long hunt, led us deep into the origins of the French language, the troubadours, *vers libre* — Heaven knows what besides! Poetry and the budgets of the working-classes; coöperation and the Gothic — all this I could not but feel was significant only as interpreting and developing the private life and soul of Ulysse Tully.

I was not, however, to be let off with generalities on this most absorbing subject. In the full tide of eloquence, he pointed to a row of notebooks on his shelf: "*Voilà ma vie, chère Mademoiselle*, my intimate life," he confessed with the naïve spontaneity that won me in spite of myself and my amusement. "It is not all admirable — no, indeed," he added, shaking his head in sad tolerance of his own shortcomings. "I quite understand, oh, quite," he continued, looking at me out of great liquid eyes which seemed, like a little boy's, to beg admiration for this magnanimity, "that some of my friends condemn me, give me up because of what has been. It is their right. And yet," he reflected, as from a height that other mortals could not reach, "the moral being that is developing in me sees my past — and accepts it."

Mme. Lys likewise accepted it, one gathered; a most remarkable woman, he repeated, whom I should appreciate. I must, he insisted, make her acquaintance when she recovered from the illness that had followed the birth of her last child. What a genius, what a heart, what a will! She had defied the world for him, with all his failures, all his poverty, all his hopes; she understood to the full the beauty of sacrifice. There was the strength of women, and how few of them appreciated it, remarked this innocent egotist, wiping his eyes emotionally. But the rôle of confidante was more than I had bargained for and I was just preparing to take my leave when I became conscious of the sudden and unexpected opening of the door behind me. Turning involuntarily I saw there a curiously disconcerting small person. A little girl, perhaps three years old. She was dressed in a white frock, and a scapula or charm of old wrought silver hung from her neck by a narrow black ribbon. Yet it was less this ornament than the pale, questioning look with which her tiny, sensitive face regarded me, and the wise shining of her dark eyes, that made her seem strange and remote, like a child out of Maeterlinck. I had an odd sense of being observed from some region of mystical but

absolute knowledge, when she had established herself opposite me on her father's knee.

M. Tully, however, greeted her with the broadest of smiles, and burst proudly into speech: this was his darling, his Suzon. "How is your mother, *ma petite?*" he inquired, bending over her to give her a resounding kiss. The answer, in the limpid, clipped French of childhood, made us both start. "*Ses yeux sont tristes quand elle regarde*" — her eyes are sad when she looks out of them, — said Suzon gently.

M. Tully's own eyes met mine in a half-alarmed glance which begged me to admire the penetration of this wonderful little creature of his, and yet protested against the truth that her insight revealed.

"She has never got back her strength," he murmured, as if vaguely troubled in spite of himself. "But she is so brave, so beautiful in her patience," he added, after a moment, and jumping up, with a happy sigh, tossed his daughter on his shoulders, and began to dance about the room, singing, in his rolling mellow voice: —

> "*Malbrouck s'en va t'en guerre,*
> *Mironton, mironton, mirontaine.*"

I seized this opportunity to gather up my notes, in spite of M. Tully's protests that we had not

half done. His cordialities, his injunctions, and his farewells followed me through the door, and I felt both baffled and relieved when I escaped from them down the stairs. Before I had gone more than one flight, however, I heard a little pattering step behind me, and a clear voice saying: "Mademoiselle, Mademoiselle!" Suzon was peering through the bannisters; when I had climbed up to meet her she took my hand, and led me to the door that the servant had called "Madame's," saying only: "*Tu es gentille; viens voir maman.*"

Following obediently, but greatly surprised, — had the invalid sent for me? — I was aware of an untidy kitchen and a smell of cooking, and then, at the end of another narrow corridor, aware only of a face on a pillow, above an expanse of counterpane. Small, still, and ivory-pale, with glossy black hair looped above the ears, and remote, bright eyes like the child's, it confronted me, and I did not need to see the vague bundle, wrapped in the shadow of an arm, to read on it the passionate seal of recent motherhood. And yet, instead of being all surrender, all love and pride and joy, it was rigid, inscrutably fixed and distant as some little Chinese Buddha — the face of a woman who is keeping feeling at bay, with vigilant fortitude.

"*Voilà petite mère*," remarked Suzon, in a soft explanatory tone: she was assuming our mutual understanding of her introduction, and the mother, moving a feeble hand, emerged, as it were, from her distance to smile dimly at us both.

But that trembling smile — it revealed precisely what the silent passivity was seeking to conceal: a poignant tenderness, an anguish of incurable wounds. While I had been enjoying M. Tully's vivid and diverting egotism across the hall, Mme. Lys had been lying here on her pillow, reviewing all that she had done and suffered to feed that careless vitality, and looking with those inscrutable eyes into who knows what vagrant future for her children. How soon would they, too, become a part of a past which was only remembered in moments of magnanimous tolerance? she seemed to ask. She was obviously, in spite of armed resistance, dying inch by inch.

Suzon, who still held my hand tightly, while I returned the smile as best I could, and then stole out again, seemed quietly aware of it. M. Ulysse, however, met me at the door, exhaling a joyous unconsciousness of anything but his own happy reactions.

"What a woman, *n'est-ce pas?*" he whispered, bending to kiss my hand in facile gratitude. "I see you do recognize — did I not say so? — her superiority, her grandeur. You must know her better — she'll soon be up again!"

···· VI ····

A Peasant Hero of Provence

ANY one who has made a long stay in Arles knows Charloun, the old peasant poet of Le Paradou. When he fails to come in from his village to the Wednesday market, the cronies and farmer-folk on the promenade des Lices find bargaining dull, and the *Félibres*, who had hoped to get a song out of their brother bard, sit gloomily at the café tables in the place du Forum, and declare that the morning has been wasted. As for popular festivals at the Arena or at Saint-Trophime, they are never complete without Charloun. Sometimes he reluctantly occupies a place of honor near M. Mistral and the other celebrities; but you can always find him afterwards in the midst of the crowd, leaning with sagging knees on his almond stick, his rusty hat jauntily set on his white head, and his keen, sagacious old face vividly reflecting all the humor and significance of the scene.

Pilgrims to the ruined stronghold of Les Baux are even more likely to encounter him — "There goes our poet," whispers the guide respectfully —

and do not soon forget the look of his thickset figure as he strides off over the wild spurs of the Alpilles. There is something immemorial about him, and he seems as much a part of the hills as the tufts of holly and juniper and evergreen oak whose roots cling so fast to the solid rock. He is, in fact, a sort of *genius loci*, and his native village of Le Paradou, once a part of the *terre Baussenque*, lies just below the height where the splendid marauding Seigneurs ruled and their lovely Queens held Court of Love.

It was in Le Paradou itself that I first made his acquaintance. We had started on our expedition from Arles, Sœur Colombe and I, by a grass-grown railway that wanders out through level fields and vines toward the jagged chain of the Alpilles. We passed below the great gray pile of the Abbey of Montmajour, paused at Fontveille, with its thin old wraiths of flour-mills, dear to readers of Daudet, and found ourselves in rolling country, violet with flowering thyme and rosemary. As we drew nearer to the Alpilles the slopes on the left grew steeper, more rugged, scarred with limestone, burned with sunlight, and we came into the midst of almond and olive trees — gnarled, red-soiled orchards climbing up to

meet the strange, sharp crags that made the skyline.

The neat little white box of a station where we descended, with its neat little rose-hung trellises, looks like a toy forgotten by a child in the rough-hewn landscape. It stands on a white road at some distance from the village, and the *chef de gare*, his chair tilted against the wall, seemed lost in contemplation of the fantastic peaks that loomed before him.

"Charloun?" — down scraped the chair, and he was at our side with one bound, proving himself no exception to the rule that every Provençal loves a lover of poetry. Charloun, *pardi!* lived at the very end of the village street, the very last house. "You are perhaps the ladies he is expecting, friends of his Avignon friends? A fine moral character, our *Félibre, ma Sœur*, much respected in the community; a good Catholic, too," he assured my companion. "And as for his gifts, Mesdames, — well, our Charloun may have seventy-odd years of hard work behind him, but he's as full of sap as one of his own olive trees," continued the station-keeper admiringly. "He's not what you might call a sentimental poet — does n't sing of the great ladies up there at Les

Baux; Alix and Queen Jeanne" — there was a shade of regret in the admission. "He's written with the sweat of his brow, has Charloun. An old friend of mine, of course, — even a collaborator, as you might say. Many a poetic evening have we spent in my station —" Bursting with village pride and devoured with curiosity, he started us on our way.

Le Paradou is shaded by the usual double row of plane trees; in the radiant April sunlight the roof the delicate, fluttering leaves spread over our heads was so transparent as to be almost impalpable. Yet the village had a very serious air; the iron tables in front of the café were deserted; no gossips stood in the baker's red-curtained doorway. We walked on, past a scattering row of brownish stone cottages, and were just reaching the garden of the last one, which had a fig tree against the wall, when the sound of quick footsteps behind us made us turn around; a square-built, vigorous old man with a stubbly white beard was swinging after us, stick in hand. He walked as men do who have faced the sun and wind all their lives, and driven a plough through many a tough bit of soil. A long black cape hung from his shoulders over his rough clothes; a rusty

sombrero added a dash of gallantry; and the keen look he gave us under the puckered wrinkles between his eyes left us in no doubt as to his identity.

"This is well thought!" — It was a kindly greeting, and he unlocked the door with haste and ushered us into the whitewashed kitchen.

"The house of an old bachelor, Madamisello," he explained, with a vaguely apologetic gesture which included the huge fireplace, where a pot hung on a crane beside a pile of twigs, and a clutter of dishes and papers on the table. "Such as you see me, I do for myself since my old mother is gone. The other room is better — come in there, then. *Remettez-vous, remettez-vous*," he continued, in the odd idiom of the Midi, setting some chairs with jerky courtesy before the hearth, which was here well swept and hung with a chintz smoke-ruffle. His French halted a little, as if he had to think it out as he went along, and he wandered about his best kitchen a shade uneasily. He was obviously worried lest he might not play the part of *Félibre* for a foreign lady in just the proper way.

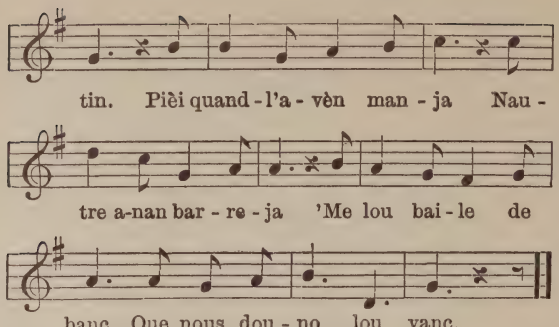
"What have I to show you?" he began. "Here is my translation of Homer into Provençal. It

was a long work; I did it for the glory of our language " — his clear blue eyes, one of which turns a little, searched my face for understanding. "Not from the Greek, from the French," he added. "I never had but six months' schooling in my life. What more have I to show you? *Tenez*" — he returned from a doubtful tour of the other room with a notebook which he opened on my knee — "here is a drama in four acts I have just finished." The pages were covered with an exquisitely careful, slender handwriting which one would not have believed of peasant origin. Next he brought me a German translation of his poems. He was getting a certain satisfaction out of acting his rôle, yet he was too sincerely modest really to enjoy it. You should have seen the warm change that came over him when I spread out my copy of his "Cant dou Terraire" ("Songs of the Soil") and asked him to explain a phrase in the "Moulin d'Òli," the song of the olive press.

"Madamisello! — you understand Provençal?" His old brown face grew into friendly wrinkles and his eyes shone obliquely at me as he drew up a chair, comfortably crossed his baggy knees and took the thin, paper-bound volume from my hand.

"Suppose you sing it for us, M. Charloun?"

"*Que*," said he, tilting his head and looking at me between narrowed lids with an expressive smile, half-mockery, half-observant kindliness, that seemed to reveal much of his character. "So you have heard that Charloun sings? It is quite true, since God willed it; and all my verses, as you see from the music printed with the text, are meant to be sung. Where do I get the airs? To tell you perhaps would n't be easy. I pick them up here and there — songs of the good old time that were oftener heard in field and farm fifty years ago than they are to-day — some, look you, have an echo of the religious wars, or come down from church music — bits I hear in cafés and arrange after my own idea. But you do well to ask for the 'Moulin d'Òli.' That is a very old air. And in this village, we live, as you may say, by our olives. It has a native note — *vouz allez voir*":



"At the olive mill — of the Mas d'Escanin — we eat aiolli, every single morning — then when we've had our fill — we go to tend the press — with the bailiff of the mill — who sets the pace for us."

He gave the rhythm, as popular *chansonniers* traditionally do, a sort of plodding monotony of emphasis, and now and then raised his right arm and lifted his chin at the same time, with his witty slanting look, as if to drive the measure and meaning of his song into our ears. His voice had a full, mellow quality that was nearer to the richness of Spain than to the sentimental Italian quaver, and struck in deeper than the senses. It blended with the soft cadences of the Proven-

çal and made the traditional rite of olive-pressing very vivid to us.

We saw the men of Le Paradou gathered at the "great farm" of the village, and in lusty spirit pushing together at the bar of the olive press when the bailiff gave the word. How the oil sparkled, and what a jolly spluttering noise it made as it flowed down into the stone trough, to the tune of the bells of a strong pair of turning mules! And how brave was the shout that went up when, at last, after all the careful processes were done, the *chaland* was seen appearing over the hill, with a bottle of fine crusty wine in which old and young joined in a health to next year!

"That, certainly," — Charloun scratched his beard, savoring our appreciation, — "is one of the best of the 'songs of work and trade.'" He read out the titles lingeringly: there were songs of harvesters and reapers, of vine-tenders, and ox-herds, and wagoners, and quarriers, and many other laborers in the farms, and vineyards, and grazing lands of the neighboring Crau and Camargue. "Geography is a queer thing, eh, Madamisello? here austere, there bountiful. Just a few miles to the north of us, in Saint-Remy, in Vau-

cluse, life is rich, full of ease. We of Le Paradou have a hardier lot. You've been to Les Baux? You've seen from the hills the wide moors and marshes that stretch from our olive orchards to the salt lakes and the Mediterranean? — a melancholy expanse, to your eye. But what would you? — we belong to it. There's something sober in our bone and sinew."

One song led to the next. "I ought, *pardi!* to save my voice for Sunday," Charloun would remind himself, "but here's just one more." So we had love-songs with pathetic minor harmonies that took us over the stony hill-paths and into the shepherds' huts; we heard the gay swing of farandole and mazurka in the villages on Sunday afternoons; we listened to the story of "Ma Galino" ("My Hen") and "The Broken Plough," an epic of the revolt of Robin, his faithful mule. Charloun has a witty and affectionate understanding of animal psychology, and his friends and comrades of the barnyard have played an important part in his life. He even took us into the confidence of his difficulties with the sheriff's officer, in a song called "Ma Sesido" ("The Seizure of my Goods").

"This," he told us, with something of the ruse

of the peasant kindling his eye, "is a humorous tale — perhaps the most popular of all my songs in the department." The turns of phrase have, indeed, all the racy expressiveness of popular speech; Blanchard, the pompous *huissier*, is inimitably characterized, and Charloun does not spare the meager contents of his own poor little house. "Oh, friend Blanchard," pleads the chorus — Charloun had escaped to the attic when the enemy entered, with his two *gardes-champêtres*. "It's true I'm a bit late with my taxes; but this is such a bad year! Go, pray, and tell the collector that he be not so zealous; in three or four days I'll step around to see him!" Blanchard, however, "straight as a poplar," only bends his neck stiffly to note everything in his inventory: a pot with beans beginning to boil; a picture of St. Peter and the cock, "which you would say was just ready to crow"; a bread-trough; a warming-pan; a bed, two pairs of old trousers, full of holes. . . .

"*Allons!* will you have for the very last the 'Return of the Mountain Shepherds'? You know, Madamisello, all our flocks have to go to the Alps in summer, and when we see them streaming back over the dusty road it is a great

emotion — or the Carol I sing up there at Les Baux, at the midnight mass of the shepherds on Christmas Eve — ah, ah, *ma Sœur*, it's beautiful" — Sœur Colombe's eyes were bright — "when the dark old church is alight, and the youngest of the flock is laid on the altar of the sheepshearers."

I believe the old man would be singing yet if I had n't asked him what first led him to write verses.

"Ah, *ma brave Demoiselle*" — I saw that the question brought us nearer — "it was 'Mireille.' And why not? The village schoolmaster lent it to my father. 'Thou must read it to thy children,' he told him. My father did n't, *mon Dieu*, care about it. To say truth, at first on me, too, it made little impression; the beautiful language of Mistral was n't the rude *patois* we of Le Paradou spoke. But, as I used to work at my olives, the rhythm began to sound in my head. And I said to myself I would try to make verses, too, in the Provençal tongue, according to my own idea, for my Provence, for my comrades. How many little birds on the sumac bushes, when one is young, Madamisello!" He sighed and rubbed his bristly chin.

"Look you," he began again, with some little

hesitation, "I believe you understand? I am talking of intimate and sacred things. . . . Poetry just comes, like a spring. You don't know why — or why it sometimes stops coming. One must be willing to say only a little, if need be. Above all, never invent — say only what one knows and feels. That's the only virtue I have, *moi qui vous parle*. Try for an effect and it's lost. Look at those Parisians. They go on because they have once begun. Ah, ah, pressure, fame — we have no Lamartines now. And then, there is commerce, *parbleu!* It is industry that prevents you from having great poets in America now, is n't it so? I read of Pittsburg in my newspaper; it sounds like as two pebbles to Salon, — eh? You know Salon, that large manufacturing town not far from here? There are, I'm told, as many as thirteen thousand inhabitants! Well, there is n't a writer in the place. In a village close by live two or three poets. I thank the *belle Sainte Vierge* that I was born in a village."

"Yet as to time," I objected, "you can't have had much more than the Salonais."

"For writing? I believe you, my poor young lady! Only, till my old age, when the other laborers were resting in the heat of the day; I was the

oldest of a sizable family, so it was n't merely our olives I had to tend. In bad years or idle seasons I had to hire out, here and there — turn reaper and shearer and vintager. For that matter, work is the common lot; only the sickest will die of it, as my mother used to say. She had a tongue of her own, and no patience with versifying; a poet to her was a *badaud*, a *songe-creux* — some sort of lazy loon." He shook his head ruefully. "She was right in her way; it is n't sous one gets out of it, to be sure. But sometimes, Madamisello, it seems hard, do you know, that nobody in one's family understands? I have one brother left — but when he comes to see me, can I talk to him as I do to you? *Nenni!* he would only laugh. If I'd had a wife and children to keep, even my siestas would have been lost to poetry. So I've stayed single. It's lonely, I don't say to the contrary — but one must make sacrifices in this life, Madamisello. *Tenez*, when I'm going to give an evening of singing anywhere, to the guardians of the wild Camargue cattle, or at Beaucaire on a Sunday, I can't touch wine during the week. Everything has its cost. But poetry, as for that, comes while you're working," ended Charloun. "I have dug my best rhymes

out of a field at the foot of the Alpilles. That's why I still keep a piece of land. I wake at three in the morning, nowadays, and things begin — God be praised — to sing in my head. If the verse does n't come, I say my prayers again — in this life one must have faith. But if the *bon Dieu* does n't happen to send a rhyme, I get up and take my spade and go out."

When we returned to the station, we found the *chef de gare* watching for us, and eager to hear our impressions of his "collaborator." He, also, was a *Félibre*, he confided, and gave a rhapsodic description of his station at four in the morning — the silence, the nightingales at dawn! But the duties of his profession were very severe; he was not, like Charloun, able "to live his life." "Charloun has a few thousand francs, but what does he make of them? He cares nothing for money. When he is composing he forgets to eat, *pecaïre!* He might not have had a comfortable roof to his head if we of Le Paradou had n't united to buy him his house. All the same he is right — he lives his life, and for everything he has his idea, *pardi!*"

"Did you ever hear how he tried the stonemason's trade?" By this time the station-keeper

had pressed us to accept chairs by his trellis. "No? That was when I was a little boy, years ago: Our great Mistral relates it in the preface to the 'Cant dou Terraire.' Well, then, at Le Paradou they decided to build a new cemetery; Charloun, to every one's surprise, — for he was no mason, — took the contract at the lowest bidding, and slaved early and late with old Robin, his mule, hauling the stone and building the walls. What for? — he did n't make water to drink! It was, if you'll credit it," — our companion was fluttering the pages in haste and turned a deaf ear to the whistle of our approaching train, — "for the pleasure of writing on the cross that stands in the middle of the enclosure a patriotic verse in our native tongue; 'So that in one hundred years,' he said, 'in five hundred years, — in perhaps one thousand years, — those who read this carved stone will know that at Le Paradou they spoke Provençal!'"

In spite of Charloun's devotion to the cause of the Provençal renaissance, he was for many years unable, for lack of time and means, to make an actual part of the *Felibrige*. Now, in the increas-

ing ease of his advancing years, it is delightful to find him one of the most popular members of the brotherhood of Provençal poets. When, a month after my excursion to Le Paradou, I saw them all gathered together at Aix-en-Provence for the great septennial fêtes of Sainte-Estelle, Charloun seemed one of the most genuinely representative members of their happy poetic democracy. His homely songs were very much in demand; at the *Cour d'Amour* the crowd joined, thousands strong, in the chorus to "Ma Sesido," and his compeers split their sides laughing at his tale of his "Voyage à Paris."

Who would not have liked to meet him in front of the Pantheon, leaning on his almond staff! The journey to Paris was the great adventure of his old age — perhaps, indeed of his whole humble life. For to travel even so far as Aix is a tremendous affair for Charloun. Arles is familiar ground, but it is difficult to induce him to visit Avignon, and he is never so much himself as in his native village.

Charloun's own fête, thanks to the efforts of his "collaborator," was celebrated at Le Paradou in June; a charming family festival on traditional lines, it proved, such as every true lover of the

"province of provinces" most appreciates. Imagine the *Félibres* and the groups of poetical friends from Arles, and Avignon, and Tarascon descending from the toy train on a hot Sunday morning, mopping their faces with red bandanas, opening their green umbrellas, — for the June sun was merciless, — and blinking as they emerged into the white glare. The *Félibre* station-keeper, proud and joyously perspiring, marshalled us all into line: the entire population of the country had gathered to receive us. There were pretty girls in white *coiffes* and kerchiefs, handsome youths in white trousers and red sashes, shepherds, farmers and their women-folk, sunburnt "*gardians*" from the Camargue, children, and village gossips, and important civic authorities.

Headed by two bands of musicians — the *Lyre de Beaucaire* and the *Tambourinaires de Maillane* had kindly offered their services — our procession advanced under the plane trees. The far end of the village was soon reached, the drums and flutes sounded their loudest flourishes; and Charloun appeared, a fine, clumsy, touching figure, at the door of the little brown cottage. His eyes were sparkling, but he did n't know quite where to look.

There was, however, no resisting the ardent tribute of popular admiration. He was embraced, slapped on the back, swept on into the "order of the day," which continued according to precedent. First came a speech overflowing with "regionalism" from M. le Maire at the Town Hall. He did not fail to recall that Charloun had built the Town Hall, as he had the cemetery, for the sole profit and glory of writing a Provençal verse over the door. When the State had had its say, we proceeded to the village church to hear a solemn mass, with old Provençal canticles, and a sermon on the "Cult of our native church-tower."

The lunch that followed at the café, and in the fields, unloosed tongues and set the farandole whirling down the dusty shade of the road. And the afternoon ended with a programme of music and poetry before the old façade of the Mas d'Escanin, which dates from the time of the Seigneurs of Les Baux.

A pair of Charloun's friends stole away from the festivities in the late afternoon, and striking in through one of the red-soiled valleys, where the olive trees roll in soft gray lines to the foot of the Alpilles, scrambled up through sliding pebbles

and close-growing patches of thyme and gorse to the top of the nearest mountain spur. The hour had diffused an intense purity of light over the wastes of timeless stone; the strange, silent peaks seemed burning with an austere radiance; and the acrid sweetness of herbs, steeped all day in the hot Provençal sunshine, rose to the wide blue vault above.

The Alpilles must have had as somber a beauty, we reflected, when the Romans were encamped up there on the tortured heights between Les Baux and Glanum (Saint-Remy), waiting and watching for the Barbarians. In those days Charloun would have scouted for Marius in these same rocky solitudes, and heard the same pebbles dropping down into the valley, beneath his cautious foot. I saw him hunting partridges among the prickly juniper bushes for the Counts of Les Baux, in the fierce days when the hills ran with blood, and feasting was heavy after battle in the halls that now make so grim and riddled an outline against the sky. Yes, we agreed, Charloun was a *genius loci;* the guardian of this admirable desolation; the very spirit of the fruitful olive orchards that cling to its lower slopes. He could no more utterly perish, one felt, than the

characteristic tree of his Midi, which carries immortality in its heart.

"Just look at that hoary old olive," said my companion, as we climbed down again into the orchard; "the tree, I mean, all twisted and bent with age, that has its branches propped up, and its trunk full of plaster. It must be a thousand years old. If you'd seen it last autumn you'd have called it dead, I'll wager, — hollow trunk, withered branches, dropping leaves! But a Provençal farmer will never admit that one of his ancestral olives can die. He just nurses it a little, puts a patch here and a crutch there and a good warm blanket of rich earth about the roots. And see how right he is! With the first spring sunshine all these slim green shoots begin to feather out" — my friend laid an affectionate hand on the crabbed bark. "I can feel the sap flowing! And look at the newly budding leaves; the old tree is born again and will outlive another century, another thousand years, perhaps!"

At this moment a sudden wave of music and a long sound of cheering rose from the homely cluster of roofs at our feet to remind us that Charloun's festival must be nearly at an end. Soon a lively mass of tiny figures began to emerge

from the village onto the ribbon of white road: the hero, flanked by the *tambourins* and *galoubets*, which were striking up a last *aubade*, was escorting his admirers to the evening train. The sunset light made a bright halo about the dusty procession, drew long, slanting rays across the wide blue haze of the plain beyond, and touched the distant salt lakes with a red gleam.

"Ah!" said my Provençal friend, as we made our way through the valley toward the station, "is it not good to know, in this practical century of ours, — good especially for an American to know that there is still one country where poets are sages, and poetry gets almost more than its due?"

···· VII ····

M. le Curé's Lunch-Party

M. LE CURÉ's lunch-party was the climax of my stay in the convent at Arles. The very memory of it, rejoicing as the Provençal sun, brings the glow of the spontaneous human kindness of the Midi into my heart. The day was one of those that have no obvious story to tell, and yet remain charged for all time with a sense of high festivity.

I remember that something in the very tone of Mère Justinienne's voice warned me, when she first proposed our expedition, that it would be worth the sacrifice of an antiquity or two. We were sitting in her little office, with its door open to the convent garden, sipping a delicious tisane, when she expressed the hope that I could spare time from my other excursions to drive with her to lunch with "an old friend of the Sisters," the curé of a certain country parish in the neighborhood of Arles.

"It would be an act of charity!" echoed Sœur Colombe, who had brought the tisane and was hovering solicitously about us. "M. le Curé cares

so much for good society. And he is so much alone, poor man, in that quiet village since his mother's death — only an old *bonne* in the house!"

"A *bonne* devoted, indeed," explained the Superior, "and trained by his mother to serve him well. He lives," she added with a blandly reminiscent air, "more formally than most country priests. You will see. He tells me that his good Marie has orders to put the compote-dishes on the table even when there is nothing to fill them, that she may never forget how things are done in the world."

M. le Curé responded with the most amiable cordiality. A date was fixed — and then another, and another. At the last moment something always happened to upset our plans. But the more it rained, the more duties parochial or conventual thwarted our hopes, the brighter grew the glamour. No other village in the sun-browned plain about Arles could equal M. le Curé's for flowery charm and verdant shadiness. Nowhere else, as the Sisters who had nursed in his parish could vouch, did coffee have the flavor which distinguished the steaming bowls so benevolently offered at the *presbytère* after early mass, — the

kind man, said the Mother, actually realized how the Sisters must feel after a long night's vigil and a long walk! And M. le Curé, to cap the climax, had been born within sight of Mistral's garden wall. In a land where the blood of the troubadours still runs hot this privilege adds luster even to the aureole of an ecclesiastic.

I could hardly believe that legend was turning to truth when the sun rose cloudless on my last morning. Promptly at half-past ten Joseph's carriage was reported at the door. Sœur Colombe, shining with sympathy, tucked us in, arranged the Mother's shawl, and put a plump black bag in her lap. "Red mullet — beauties!" she whispered. Mère Justinienne frowned a little at the indiscreet words. The fact was — well, as this was Friday, and as a country market was sure to be poor in anything but the grosser varieties of fish, she was taking M. le Curé something *fin*, something delicately toothsome, which he would not feel humiliated to offer ladies.

When we had rattled down the steep, cobbled streets, past the ancient Theatre, into the Promenade des Lices, and turned southward, the Mother settled herself expectantly for an hour of bucolic delight. Nature has endowed this piece

of level countryside, at the very edge of the barren Crau and the vines and tufted marshes of the Camargue, with a soft, smiling greenness more suggestive of Normandy than of Provence. It is a haying region, and on our late April morning the fields that bordered the road were warm with sunlight; daisies and buttercups made a bright glimmer across the tall grass; long, straight alleys, shaded thick with ancient horse-chestnut and plane trees led into comfortable farmhouses. Mère Justinienne knew the history of every one: this was the "*campagne*" of which Mlle. Roquette had been cheated by her cruel nephews; that, of a doubtful reputation, belonged to a wine-merchant from Marseilles. There were plenty of stories, and we bowled along at a smart pace under a row of spotted plane trees till at last houses began to edge the street, and an unpretending yellow stucco edifice with a tower came into sight — the church! We drew up beside it, in front of the *presbytère*, which had a garden full of roses, and a parrot on the window ledge; and out dashed M. le Curé, rubbing his hands together and crying, in expansive welcoming tones: "Ah, *ma sainte Supérieure, ah, ma sainte Demoiselle, enfin vous voilà!* What a happiness, what a pleasure!"

To be greeted as a saint might have been rather disconcerting to a heretic, if M. le Curé's smile had not reinforced the cry of his heart. His great red countenance shone. All the world was "sainted" for him, I soon discovered; unction flowed from his lips, and everything about his person, from his full-blown cheeks to his swelling cassock, was smooth and rotund and generous. He was made on such a large scale that he quite dwarfed the humble *presbytère* as he stood there among the yellow rose bushes. I caught myself wondering how he would ever get through his own front door. But he ducked in after us, still ejaculating, "Ah, my sainted friends, what a pleasure!" and waved us into the study on the left.

To our dismayed surprise another black cassock loomed from a chair at the back of the room to salute us. "My old friend, M. l'Abbé ——," explained our host affectionately, "who came all the way from Maillane to help me with my First Communion yesterday. We help one another out, as friends must, whenever we can." Mère Justinienne did not look at me, but I knew by the set of her coif that she, too, was combating a feeling of disappointment — here was an intruder upon our wonderful, our sacred day.

The stiff solemnity of M. l'Abbé's bow was far from reassuring. Tall, red-faced, and stoutly built like his friend — and like him, no doubt, descended from the fine old yeoman stock of the plain of Saint-Rémy — his stern features seemed hewn of rough granite instead of moulded and smoothed, and his iron-gray hair gave him a look of elderly solemnity that was the very antithesis of M. le Curé's exuberance.

"*Voyons un peu, voyons un peu,*" began our host, in a relaxed, rejoicing voice that shed balm on our disquieted reflections. "*Voyons un peu,*" and he glided monumentally about the room, establishing us in the most comfortable chairs, and producing a decanter and glasses. "Very mild," he urged, "and distilled by the hands of a sainted friend." How could Mère Justinienne politely refuse? Things began to seem more cheerful. We settled down to conversation. The ceremony of yesterday was first in everybody's thoughts. Were n't the gentlemen very tired?

"A little, a little," deprecated M. le Curé. "I talked all day. I give myself freely. I give all I can, it's true."

"I should say so, indeed," said the Mother; "we all know your devotion."

"So one must," put in M. l'Abbé with sudden emphasis, in a peculiarly raucous tone which cut like the mistral, after the sunny warmth of M. le Curé's — "so one must spend one's self if the truth is to penetrate."

"Yes," went on M. le Curé, his excellent face folding into serious lines, "and my dear children responded; their eyes were like stars to me as I talked — the *Sainte Vierge* was helping me. The ladies of the *pensionnat* had decorated the church with infinite grace and taste, and there were five hundred people at vespers in that tiny church meant for two hundred, and not a sound, believe me, but the rustle of the wings of the guardian angels. . . ."

"Perhaps, Mademoiselle," said the Abbé, "you do not realize that in the Midi it is not always easy to exact silence in church if there is a crowd. There are women who, in their desire for seats, in their eagerness to see, push, shout — in short, forget themselves. What tongues, *mon Dieu*, what tongues!" His own southern accent twanged sharper as he spoke.

M. le curé settled with a chuckle into what he also would have called the *coing* of his easy chair. "The other day," he said, "I was in a tram-car

at Marseilles, where an old fishwife was pouring out her life history at the top of her strident lungs. Such stories — the whole tram was silenced and listening. Suddenly, in a brief pause, out speaks a grim old tar next me — it's better in the Marseilles *patois:* 'If she were a parrot, she'd bring five hundred francs.'"

The story set things going, and the abbé, gradually unbending, turned out to be, after all, an addition to the party. He had tales to tell of the Camargue, where, because of his "infirmity," he had long had a tiny parish.

"*Mes amis de Dieu,*" said M. le Curé compassionately, "you must know that a great preacher was lost to the church by a bad larynx. For three years my poor friend could n't speak above a whisper. He had to give up his large town parish finally and take an inconsiderable one in that salt desert, where the flock was small enough for a hoarse voice to carry from the pulpit. *Aïe* — more mosquitoes than parishioners there!"

The abbé nodded grimly. Yet though the mosquitoes were bad the hunting was fabulously good, he said — quail, partridge, snipe, duck, goose — every wild bird that ever haunted a

marsh or a vineyard, — and with a flavor! His eloquence grew as he enumerated them, till they fluttered out from the tamarisk hedges before our very eyes; his face reddened as to the slap of sea-winds, and we saw marshes stretching wide under a wide sky, and striding off with powerful step toward a flat horizon a giant black figure, gun on shoulder, dog at heel. . . .

M. le Curé chimed in with Horatian descriptions of game-dishes of which he had partaken at his friend's table. He had a sister, it appeared, who knew arts in cookery such as no Northerner could ever hope to rival.

M. l'Abbé modestly agreed. "I have always had my Mary and my Martha. Believe me, Mme. la Supérieure," — he was unbending, a little sententiously, in the Mother's approving smile, — "I had never to give a thought either to my house or my church. One took charge of the first, the other of the second. In that I have been much blessed by the *bon Dieu*. When my liver protested and the doctor forbade a game diet, I gave up my curacy — what use to hunt if you can't eat what you kill? — and we went back to the house of our fathers in Maillane. I cultivate our farm lands and make myself the appren-

tice of the furrow again. And there we are growing old together."

"Is he not a lucky man, after all, my friends?" M. le Curé drew a sigh. "Two admirable sisters to care for him, and here am I alone. There, Mademoiselle, is my dear and sainted mother." The faded photograph of a sweet-faced woman in Provençal dress hung over his desk. "Even the *sainte fille* to whom she confided me when she died, even my good Marie, is now getting too old to work. I give her a pension and she comes to help the new *bonne* on great occasions like this one. You'll be tolerant? My poor Beatrice is ailing, too, and this, you know, is a fast-day. But we are simple, in any case, simple by necessity, simple by preference!"

Lunch had indeed the perfect simplicity which comes, in France, of much reasoned calculation. The cloth was threadbare, but the *compotiers* were lavishly filled, and the thoroughly Provençal meal was washed down with famous native wines from the cellars of M. le Curé's devoted friends. Even the *ordinaire* came from a slope that distilled an almost Burgundian richness. We drank it with the *hors-d'œuvre*, salty olives from Le Paradou, thin slices of tomato garnished with

chopped parsley, red radishes from the garden of the *presbytère*. Our host kept a solicitous eye on the kitchen door, and, when appetites were just sufficiently whetted, summoned the lobster, prepared with a sauce unknown a hundred miles from Marseilles. The spinach that followed was cunningly smoothed with the rich olive oil of the region; and with the red mullet came a salad for epicures. A bottle of fragrant old Ventoux kept us lingering here, but there were still piping hot *pâtissons de* Beaucaire, spicy little tarts, as mellow as the departed days of the great fair, and a custard which drew out a word of praise even from the deprecatory curé. "Not bad, *ton flan*," he called out to the old servant whom we could see bending an anxious wrinkled face over the kitchen hearth.

The crowning point of the feast was, however, reached with the dessert, when M. le Curé rose himself to fetch his most precious treasure, a much-reputed Muscat from the region of Montpellier. He bore in the dusty bottle like a sacrificial offering. "Frontignan of '62," he murmured reverently, as he tilted it so that I might see the brownish purple veil clinging to the inside. We sipped our small glasses of the sweet, ineffable fluid in silence, drop by drop.

Conversation at lunch had had a marked culinary bias. The lobster had reminded M. l'Abbé of a dish known as *homard à l'Américaine* in the fish restaurants of Marseilles, and I had been challenged for lobster recipes at the point of the fork. By the time coffee was served in the study, however, the talk took a more æsthetic turn. We strolled up and down, examining M. le Curé's *objets d'art.* Besides the usual religious prints and mottoes which hung above the meager bookshelves, there was the château of Chillon, painted by a friend. To think that I had seen the original — what travelers these Americans were! Those oddly shaped and elegant vases were, underneath the gilding, egg-shells! the highly esteemed fabrication of a widowed parishioner. But what most took my eye was an illuminated square, rather like a coat of arms, framed in gold and standing on an easel in the corner.

"That, Mademoiselle, is M. le Curé's epitaph, so to speak," said the Mother. "You'll explain it, will you not, to Mademoiselle?"

M. le Curé joined me before the easel. His "*voyons un peu*" was rapturously concurrent. "You know," he said, "that every Provençal farmer's daughter raises silkworms? Mireille her-

self, you'll remember, was picking the leaves of the mulberry tree when she first fell in love with Vincent; every *mas* has its mulberry trees. Well, then, on the shield in the middle of the picture you will observe a silkworm on a branch of mulberry; above the worm, the cocoon; above that a butterfly, unfolding under the rays of the sun. Below you'll read on a scroll these words" — and he translated from the Provençal: "'Grace of God, by thy ray, the silkworm becomes a butterfly.' My name, my good young lady — this the fine point — means silkworm in Provençal. So this motto, happily found for me by my great fellow townsman himself — see, the artist has put it in the corner, 'Mistral'! and artistically worked out by the same friend who painted the château of Chillon — has a symbolic meaning, and later will be carved on my tomb."

The curé crossed his hands over one of the round, vermicular folds of his soutane and beamed from head to foot. In no other land could such jovial charm radiate from so sepulchral a subject.

The afternoon was rounded off by a walk. The Mother had promised this, too, talked of a little brook beside a green lane, and an old park full of roses. The lane turns in between the *presby-*

tère and the church and passes the white-walled graveyard on its way to the haying fields beyond. At the cemetery gate our procession paused; the abbés bared their heads and stood for a moment in silence.

These sturdy country priests were very much at home in the fields. Their ancestry was written all over them; the two soutanes, black as they were, did not make a false note in the sweet spring landscape. M. le Curé moved lightly along at the Mother's side; there was almost a skip in his tread. Now turning his huge, benevolent countenance about to call my attention to the state of the hay crop, now bending an agile vastness of back to pick buttercups for his companion, he welcomed us to Dame Nature's bounty as if it were his own. The abbé moved along more heavily at my side, the bottom of his cassock scattering the heads of the daisies, his strong, severe face turned relentingly toward the sun. His spirit did not soar on joyous wings like his friend's, for he was no natural optimist; victory for him must have been won out of battle with the hosts of doubt and pain. But little by little, as we walked through the fragrant fields and past the white hawthorn hedges, the hard outer crust melted,

and I was allowed to see the light of kindness and rectitude that burned deep below the surface.

M. le Curé came to a halt at last at a gate in a high wall. He pointed out, in the distance, the new Communal school, spreading a resplendent façade along the village street. "There, my sainted young lady, is modern progress for you." His sigh was almost melancholy. "It represents an incredible number of thousands of francs, and the children don't know how to read and write."

M. l'Abbé, stern again, and with almost the only approach to ecclesiasticism we had during the day, said that the high percentage of illiteracy in France — proved by recent statistics — might be called God's punishment of the faithless. "*Mais on reviendra, on reviendra* — they 'll come back to the fold," he added with conviction.

The big park which we entered, when M. le Curé had unlocked the gate, was not for the two priests a much more encouraging sign of the times. M. le Curé still had his freedom of the place, but in the old days, when the great family lived in the house, he would have had his seat at the noble board — his *couvert* — twice a week, as regularly as the months sped by. Now the châte-

laine was dead, the heir lived in Paris, the caretakers were letting everything go to seed; the alleys were unraked, the shrubs and flowers had grown into lovely neglected tangles. The roses had outrun all bounds; there were pale and deep pink ones under the hedges; pure white ones in the parterres; brilliant or sullen red ones climbing through the shrubs, twining in the very treetops.

The nightingales were whistling from secret places — it seemed an invitation to enjoy the bloom, and Mère Justinienne looked about her in ecstasy. May not a nun indulge a weakness for flowers, since she lays them all at the Virgin's feet? The abbés, on a simultaneous impulse, got out their jack-knives and began to vie with each other in despoiling the bushes. M. le Curé flew from one bed to another, and piled the Mother's arms high. Even the full-grown roses seemed to him worth picking. "They'll be gone to-morrow, but enjoy them to-night," he exclaimed. The abbé was more deliberate in his movements, searched conscientiously for buds, and reached up always toward the branches that grew high above his long reach. "The 'bird's branch'" said he, quoting from "Mireille": —

"Yet on that ravaged tree thou savest oft
Some little branch inviolate aloft,
Tender and airy up against the blue
Which the rude spoiler cannot win unto:
Only the birds shall come and banquet there . . ."

Anecdotes of the divine fellow townsman beguiled our walk back to the *presbytère*. An occasional white-veiled little girl, or boy with white-beribboned arm gave a vaguely festival air to the village street; a breath of yesterday's incense still hung in the air. M. le Curé's affectionate encounters with the aunts and uncles and grandmothers who had come in from the country to celebrate the *fêtes de famille* which attend a First Communion showed the place he held in the hearts and lives of the region. Catholicism never wore a gentler, simpler, or more comforting face. One young peasant, just driving off in a two-wheeled cart with his wife and baby, jumped down from his high seat to be kissed on both cheeks and tell the latest news of the farm. "I baptized this fellow" — M. le Curé fondly introduced him — "and now see where he's got to — and never a moment's anxiety has he given me." A promise was made to visit the old mother next day. "I always visit the sick and the old, Mademoiselle, as Mme. la Supérieure will tell you. My parish-

ioners have the habit of sending for me if they have so much as a cold. It gives us all pleasure, and they are prepared. . . ."

The copper pans that had cooked our rare lunch were set in the sunny kitchen window when we turned into the garden. The parrot squawked a greeting; the good old servants were watching at the door. Another smooth cordial, made by the hands of another *sainte dame*, had to be tasted before we were allowed to climb into Joseph's carriage with our roses. Even then the abbés continued to tower monumentally beside us. Their ruddy faces, all turned toward kindness and good cheer, showed a gratifying reluctance to let us go.

"You won't forget, *ma sainte Demoiselle*," urged M. le Curé, folding his plump hands on his well-cushioned chest — "you won't forget to include in your next Provençal journey a lunch with the poor little country curé?"

"And one at Maillane with the old abbé and his old sisters?" asked M. l'Abbé after his stiffer manner. "The Provençal sun will draw you back, willy-nilly," he added, his grim smile softening as he laid a hand on the curé's shoulder: —

"Grand soulèu de la Prouvènço
Gai coumpaire dóu mistrau . . ."

Under cover of this last appropriate quotation from Mistral Joseph gave his horses a discreet flick. But, as we rolled away, M. le Curé's jocund voice followed us: "Great sun of Provence. . . ."

···· VIII ····

Achille

When I want to know what the literary Paris of the late nineteenth century was like, I pay a visit to my friend Achille. Before I go I make some necessary psychological readjustments. Barrès and his nationalism; the *jeunes gens d'aujourd'hui* with their aviation, their cult of gayety and activity; the *Unanimiste* poets with their social consciousness; Mme. Claude with her feminism — all these people and topics of the hour must be forgotten when one spends an afternoon with Achille. In his day poets were poets, writing in traditional metres, instead of being chemists, philosophers, and picture-dealers, writing in a jargon of their own. In his day Academicians were glorious personages, and famous novelists wore top hats and gardenias. In his day melancholy was the fashion; taste was more important than morals; and the only thing you could be sure of was that you could be sure of nothing. In his day, in brief, the man of letters

was supreme, and second only to him was his understudy, the literary bookseller.

Achille is the last living example of the species, and his move from the boulevard to a small apartment up several flights of stairs in a back street marked the end of an epoch. To Achille himself it seemed equivalent to a burial, and all the leading newspapers bore him out by publishing obituary notices. The special occasion for his failure was the infidelity of a trusted clerk, but the real cause lies deeper: in the fact that books are now sold, even in Paris, like shoes or neckties, instead of like works of art. When Achille set up for himself in the eighties, on the still un-Americanized boulevards, one of the regular daily occupations of the Frenchman of the world — writer, lawyer, banker, artist, actor — was a visit to his bookseller. Even now Achille is unable to realize that a customer is a person who gives two minutes and three francs fifty for the first common "yellow-back" that catches his eye. The traditional "*Je suis à vos ordres, Mademoiselle,*" which terminates one's afternoon, always comes as rather a shock, though it be spoken with royal condescension. To him a customer is a friend: somebody who spends from half an hour to an hour and a half

turning over all the books on the counter; somebody who must be discreetly guided, cajoled, and amused.

Because Achille is a fatalist, and I happened in on him for the first time, with an introduction from Mme. B., on the saddest day of his life, — the day preceding his move from the old shop, — he assumes that our friendship is written in the stars. It was one of those thick, gray, slimy afternoons of the Paris winter, when ennui stalks abroad. The women in the boulevard kiosks had withdrawn into the depths of their black shawls; the wet sidewalks were tented with dripping umbrellas, and as I opened the door of Achille's distinguished store I asked myself why I had come so far. For it was half-dismantled; an indifferent youth was packing books in a corner; and instead of the elegant literary figure I had expected to see, here was only a dismal, shabby old man, with a black handkerchief tied over one eye, lost apparently in a neuralgic dream.

"M. Achille?" The old man stirred. "My friend Mme. B——" Ah, there I had given the countersign. The black handkerchief vanished, and a courtly, erect Parisian of the old school was bowing over my hand.

"*Quelle charmante femme!*" Mme. B., *bonheur;* they began with the same letter, and it was certain that I brought him luck. When he heard that I was interested in literary pursuits he found another *b* for me — "*Vous qui êtes de la boutique*" — you who are in the trade." It put me on a plane of intimacy and gave me a right to the best seat in the new shop.

This best seat is a Louis XV chair, and the shop is nothing more nor less than Mme. Achille's salon. So do Frenchwomen meet circumstance. Shelves have been neatly put up on the blue satin striped walls, and all through the long entrance corridor too; they extend, Achille told me in a whisper, even into the kitchen. The salon-shop, to those who have no memories, is certainly a jolly little place. Between the windows stands a glass-fronted bookcase of elegant design, which contains Achille's chief treasures: a collection of authors' copies, all heavily inscribed. "*À mon ami Achille, l'arbitre des réputations littéraires*": when Anatole France has written this dedication in your copy of "Thaïs" and Lamartine has made you smoke your first cigar, even adversity cannot bring you low.

Achille in his old age is a little deaf. One of his

eyes turns up. There is often a suspicion of red flannel about his waist-line, for he suffers from lumbago. But both his personal appearance and his manner still manage to convey an impression of what the delicate culture and liberal dilettantism of the last century were like. His eyes, when he is interested, have a blue flame, and there is real distinction in the poise of his pale head, with its fine white skin and carefully curled white hair and beard. The Couture drawing over the mantelpiece — his second greatest treasure — is still very like him, though it represents a young dandy of twenty-five.

The yellowing photographs of actors, and painters, and writers that hang between the bookshelves date from the same enchanting but disenchanted quarter-century that preceded the birth of the twentieth. There is Sarah Bernhardt at the height of her allurement; Ludovic Halévy, dark and melancholy; Dumas *fils*, foppishly detached, and so on: all inscribed, like the books, "To my friend Achille." With the same words, "*Achille, mon ami, ça va-t-il?*" spoken with affectionate solicitude, the clientèle that remains faithful comes puffing in. It seems to consist almost entirely of stout, fashionable gentlemen

who have lived well and long. They wear decorations in their buttonholes, carry canes, and usually bring, in their immaculately gloved hands, a little box of chocolates "for Madame."

Madame is something of a mystery. I have never really seen her, though I am just conscious of the shadow of a black gown and a quiet, resigned, tender face behind the door that stands ajar into the neighboring bedroom, — a shadow that watchfully guards the old man in the black skull-cap whom I usually find deep in a Balzac novel by the window.

It is so customary for a wife to be the genius of a Paris shop that the separation of functions in Mme. Achille is striking. I have no doubt that she is really at the bottom of such business as remains. Yet because his tradition of elegance forbids the coöperation of a wife in the *petit bourgeois* manner, Achille never calls her in, however hard it may be to find a book. He speaks of her very often. The locked bookcase is her heritage, he tells me. She will sell the famous autographs and have a guaranty for her old age. He describes to me, too, how, as he lies in his bed reading Balzac in the evening, she sits always beside him.

"Ah, *que c'est joli, les 'Mémoires de deux jeunes*

mariées' — I declare it's the prettiest thing I ever read. I believe I wept a little last night when one of them lost her baby — you remember? My wife had to scold me. Sometimes I drop off in the middle of a chapter, then I wake a shade sad and speak to her, and she is always there, always. *Elle est charmante, ma femme, et elle m'aime bien.*" To Achille the first need of man, outside of literature, is to be loved well, and the first virtue of woman is charm. When we talk of George Sand, he always ends, rather disparagingly, "A genius, yes, but she looked like a *petite bourgeoise mal arrangée*" — a badly dressed, unpretentious little woman.

Stories about the great writers of his youth are Achille's chief stock in trade. I made in the beginning the almost fatal mistake of asking him to procure me modern novels and *vers-libre* poets. As a consequence, his manner of greeting me now has in it something of admonition. He considers me a brand to be saved from the burning, and when he hobbles to the bookcase — his lame, and tired, and flabby lower parts recall his fallen fortunes, though his head towers above them — it is in the hope that one of his sacred copies of Maupassant or Daudet may prove to me the unworth-

iness of "Jean Christophe." He keeps his piercing blue eye on me as I turn the pages, to see whether the magic is working; though I must say no collector I know is so generous with his loans. He offers me all sorts of precious volumes, on the strength of "*la boutique*" and for the secret end of conversion. His lack of comprehension of the modern note struck me at first as pure snobbery, affectation. But I believe he really cannot make out what our incoherent age is up to. Literature used to be more important than life. Now life has become bewilderingly more important than literature. Elegance, *nuance*, form, have given place to content, and a content with which he has no sympathy. The suggestion that Paul Fort is a poet makes him tremulous with indignation.

"Do you know him, M. Achille?"

"*Moi?* know that wretched bohemian?" He drew himself up with almost a sneer.

"The romantic poets were so different, then?"

"*Je crois bien!*" And he goes back to Lamartine, who was such a great *seigneur* and gave him a cigar when he was just a little publisher's devil waiting for proofs. "The last time I saw him he bought a copy of Erckmann-Chatrian from me at my own shop. He was always interested in *les*

jeunes. Now if you want nationalism, Mademoiselle, why not Erckmann-Chatrian, instead of that narrow-minded Barrès you are always asking for?"

"And de Musset?"

"Ah, he was exquisite. So was Heine. I preferred Heine, but they were something alike, with their faces of the dying Christ, and they perished of the same disease. Hugo, in his grand old age, Sully Prudhomme, all fire and flame, de Vigny — but he was an unapproachable one — I knew them all well. How crass they make the modern men seem. Indeed, it is almost as much pain as pleasure to take one's mind for a walk among those dead whom one has known living, as Jules Lemaître puts it."

A friend of mine who happens to be the son of one of the fashionable novelists of the past, whose photograph hangs on Achille's wall, is the inheritor of a wonderful sketch-book in which Degas, during a long series of friendly evenings, noted down his impressions of the *vie de Paris* as it passed in the eighties and nineties: ballet girls, æsthetes, heroes of Dumas plays, painters and their models, Academicians and their mistresses, first nights, last nights — the jumble is keyed

exactly as Achille's stories are, and reveals the same leisurely interrelations of the acting, writing, painting worlds which have now gone so much out of date. A Mme. Mathilde Shaw, though a ward of Dumas, would find no bookseller to make her reputation in Paris to-day.

One of the most consoling memories of Achille's declining years relates to this authoress, of whom I confess never to have heard, though he assures me she is "well known in America." In any case, she wrote a book of memoirs, which Achille found ravishing. He created in his customers a furore to the same effect, and sold a thousand copies within a week. The lady, who had no other sale, having heard from her publisher of the bookseller's appreciation, went to thank him when fortune took her to Paris. They had, as Achille said, an exquisite hour together. "When she came to go, she asked me if I found her displeasing. 'Far from it, *chère Madame.*' 'Then, *cher Monsieur*, take me to my carriage.' On the curb she stopped and said: 'We have never met before, we shall never meet again, *embrassons-nous.*' So we did embrace there on the boulevard." Achille wiped away a sentimental tear.

The decline of the understudy is always more

pathetic than that of the hero, and Achille's rôle has never been anything but secondary. The *Unanimistes* would probably dismiss my old friend as a hanger-on or valet of the world of letters. But his literary tastes and preferences are first-hand, after all. I happened to be in the shop one day when a certain countess, a favorite customer, telephoned an order for "Marie-Claire."

"Are you sure you heard correctly?" he demanded crossly of the clerk. "People speak so indistinctly over the telephone," he apologized to me. "Now if she had only come in herself, I might have persuaded her not to waste her money on that intolerably dull volume. But nobody has time to take advice in these days. Can you tell me, Mademoiselle, what they do with the hours they used to spend hunting old books and new?"

Bouquiner, flâner: those are indeed nineteenth-century words. They went out of fashion when the Dreyfus Affair shattered *raffinement* and irony into bits; when the voice of the working classes began to rise; when German ships began to appear on the Moroccan coast and French business methods had to be "whooped up" to match those from beyond the Rhine.

Imagine a banker in 1912 giving an hour a day to turning over new books and old; imagine a clerk at Brentano's growing emotional over a customer's choice of a novel. Literature, it is true, is still a social art in France to a greater extent than in any other country: the flowering, the synthesizing of a "general sense of mankind" gathered from talk as well as from life, at the café as well as in the study. But the day of the literary bookseller is done. And when the salon-shop is closed for the last time and the faithful customers have, for Madame's sake, bid against one another for the autographed copies, Achille and all that he stands for will be forgotten, save by a few sentimental antiquarians.

···· IX ····

New Voices in French Poetry

The *Unanimistes* stand far outside the French Academy. But if you happen by chance on a winter afternoon into one of those scrubby halls near the Odéon, where queer bohemians gather for the discussion of new literary movements, you may find yourself strangely moved by the recitation of a poem by Vildrac or Romains. The rhythms are new; plebeian, too, like the hall; the images and ideas have a democratic tang. These poets seem to have disposed of traditional literary culture as easily as the Cubists have disposed of traditional painting, and they are, you soon discover, preaching conversion — conversion from nineteenth-century individualism to twentieth-century unification. Romains, Vildrac, Arcos, Duhamel, have together invented, or adapted from greater predecessors, a new rôle for the poet. He is no longer to be an exclusive, exalted, egotistic creature, whose lyrical raptures set him apart from the rest of the world: he is to be a man. His poetry is not to be a special lan-

guage for æsthetes, but a religion of life, a means of initiating the average mortal into the secret beauties of his everyday existence.

This creed sounds more familiarly in American than in European ears. Walt Whitman is, indeed, one of the poetical ancestors of *Unanimisme*. The other ancestor is the great Belgian Verhaeren, whose sonorous new rhythms and humanitarian doctrines were a strong influence in revolutionary French poetic circles when these young *Unanimistes* formed their coterie about 1908. But after all, even Romains' schematic "La Vie Unanime" which is accused by his enemies of deriving directly from the new theories of group-psychology developed by philosophers like Le Bon, Tarde, Durkheim, may be considered less a deliberate construction than the result of spontaneous combustion between the poet's sensibility and his age. The age — the first ten years of the new century — was one of generous social dreams. The Dreyfus Affair had been in some sort a rebirth for the more radical element of the nation, and internationalism, syndicalism, coöperation, and other forms of *solidarité sociale* were in the air. *Unanimisme*, the poets claim, is not a dogma but a faith; a faith, Duhamel puts it, "capable

of transforming the economic order and the relations of a people."

Vildrac, whom I happen to know the best of the four *Unanimistes*, is, in terms of bread-and-butter, a Post-impressionist picture-dealer. His brown-shuttered shop is just off the *quais* on the rue de Seine. The shutters stick in my mind, because the first time I went there they were tight-closed for the night, and my companion, another French poet, had to pound with his cane to call the attention of the owner. When Vildrac opened the door upon a stranger, he looked fluttered as some shy, wild, brown bird caught in a snare. But he made haste to lead us into the rear gallery where his wife was surveying, with just pride, the work of her hands. Mme. Vildrac was obviously the perfect wife for a poor poet turned *marchand de tableaux:* fair, plump, practical, with a dash of the quality that keeps the pot boiling in her theory of life, and a flowered blouse no Futurist could resist. At this moment she had just finished, without a workman, the transformation of a grimy little shop, where centuries of dust were stored, into a modern art gallery. Modern, indeed. I stood aghast before a picture of a café concert singer with a horrible, screaming, red mouth.

"Detestable, is n't it?" said Vildrac; "but is n't it faithful to our age, symbolic of present-day Paris?" Symbolize, synthesize: these words are popular with *Unanimistes* as they are with Cubists, and Romains in particular has called up images as massive and novel to poetry — summoned, I think, by the same sort of intellectualizing, analytical turn of mind — as those on the canvases of Gleizes and Metzinger.

It seems scarcely accidental that Gleizes, one of the leaders of the Cubist school, should have been one of the earlier "*Abbaye*" group from which *Unanimisme* has evolved.

> "*Je rêve l'abbaye — ah, sans abbé!* —
> *Je rêve l'abbaye hospitalière*
> *À tous épris d'art, plus ou moins crottés*
> *Et déshérités . . .*" [1]

wrote Vildrac in his early volume. Poets' dreams sometimes come true, at least for a while. Vildrac and Arcos, on a Sunday ramble in the environs of Paris in 1906, came upon an old house in a luxuriant, deserted park; and here a group of young men burning with artistic and social dreams —

> "*Artistes, artisans, buveurs de lune*" —

[1] I dream of the abbey — ah, without an abbot — I dream of the abbey hospitable to all lovers of art, more or less dingy and disinherited.

that is to say, poets, painters, sculptors, musicians, and engravers, — forthwith resolved to build an ideal community. To repair their ramshackle domicile and set their garden in order was their first care. A printing-press was then installed, and the community planned to make a livelihood by publishing books. Manual work in the press and garden in the morning; recreation in the afternoon; exhibitions, recitations, recitals for the visitors who flocked on Sunday: this was the programme. But eighteen months of dire poverty were all this French Brook Farm knew.

For the true *buveurs de lune* like Vildrac such adventures never cease to trail clouds of glory. One is conscious with him that he has had a transfiguring experience; he remembers only the best hours of talk by the fire and work in common.

> "*Vivre en amour, vivre en ferveur,*
> *En la maison des chers labeurs,*" —

this to him is a reality. What Mme. Vildrac, who had in her youth and inexperience to make the wheels go round, remembers of that bitter winter — but I must not tell. "*Je n'en parle jamais,*" she says, "*à mon mari.*"

I recall with especial pleasure, among many pleasant Unanimistic gatherings, an afternoon

spent in Duhamel's study: a long afternoon when these poets who are practical men expounded their unliterary views. There was Vildrac, the picture-dealer; Romains, the professor of philosophy, who might be the son of some substantial farmer in a country of good wines — solid, stolid, apple-cheeked, bearded and black; there was finally Duhamel, the experimental biologist, who looks every inch an intellectual scientist, with his round, brown beard and his detached, near-sighted eyes behind their glasses. And let me not fail to name a flower-like lady with veiled, brown eyes and lovely, melting ways, who gave us coffee and fetched volumes from the bookcase. On these walls, too, there hung Post-impressionist pictures above the well-filled bookshelves. M. Duhamel is poetic critic for the *Mercure de France*, the author of several volumes of criticism and one — written in collaboration with Vildrac — of poetic technique. His poetry is strongly marked with Whitman's influence, but his democracy is a little artificial. I see him sitting in the center of his life, as he sits among his books, criticizing, analyzing, appraising it, instead of letting himself be carried by the human current as Vildrac is. He confesses some-

where that he does not really like the crowd. But he cites at the beginning of his "Propos Critiques" the following phrase of Charles Louis-Philippe: "The time for gentleness and dillettantism is past; now we must have barbarians." Yes, these harmless poets with their soft brown beards call themselves "barbarians" as the early Post-impressionists called themselves "*fauves*" — wild beasts. They wish to emphasize their desire to get rid of formulæ. As Verlaine, whom they worship, puts it: —

> "*L'art, mes enfants, c'est d'être absolument soi-même;*
> *Et qui m'aime me suive, et qui me suit qu'il m'aime;*
> *Et si personne m'aime ou me suit, allons seul,*
> *Mais traditionnel et soyons notre aïeul.*" [1]

"There are too many writers in France," I remember Vildrac saying, "who look upon life as an unfortunate obstacle to a literary career. They want to hear no sound but the scratch of their own pens. When a man has nothing to do but write, he is likely to end in the Academy — *fâcheux destin!* There they sit, these *littérateurs*, in their separate corners of Paris with their sepa-

[1] Art, my friends, consists in being absolutely one's self; let him who loves me follow me, and him who follows, love; and if nobody loves or follows me, I 'll go alone, but traditionally, making my own ancestry.

rate little pieces of paper imitating other *littérateurs*, listening for old accents, instead of going out into the world and then translating the impact of their souls with the elements." Vildrac, who is poor and sensitive and not a money-maker, has often found this impact rude, but he does not flinch from it. If he has no intention of prostituting his talent, neither will he starve in a garret. For him the great reality is living, not one's reaction on living. For him the artist is only valuable in so far as he can share his personal experience, prove to the man in the street that in him, too, hides a poet, "a poet who has other things to do than write verses."

We had, I remember, much talk of the advantages and disadvantages of literary groups. Wonder was expressed that in the land of the "great Walt," where every one held hands in brotherhood, there were so few. (It was before the days of the "Imagists," the "Masses," and the "New Republic.") Were there not many mute, inglorious Miltons, asked Romains? In France, as he said, the solitary genius scarcely exists; he is always surrounded by a body of admiring friends whose praise gives him the courage of his originality; he has always the chance to get

published in a small review, and gradually, if he has the vitality, to rise to the top — that "top" being for the *Unanimistes* not the official but the *vers-libre* top, the place where Verhaeren and Paul Fort stand. I use the term "*Unanimiste*" in describing this particular *cénacle;* yet Duhamel was very emphatic that he and his friends were only a group to this extent: men of the same age and race who cherished the same hopes. Their poetry and the philosophy behind it were formative, positive, human; they stressed the things men had in common outside of class or nation or creed. But there the likeness ceased. There was only one real *Unanimiste:* "*C'est* Romains."

What, then, is *Unanimisme* proper? Really a new sort of polytheism whose point of departure is that human entities gathered into a group do not add up into so many separate individuals, but fuse into a new substance, which Romains chooses to call "god." Its most primitive manifestation, the vehicle of the race, is the god of the group of two. Then comes the god of the family; then the somnolent god-village; then the mighty god-town; then the god-crowd, a blind, implacable monster, whose force is incalculable. All the important movements of the day Romains be-

lieves are "breathed forth, exhaled from multitudes." It is those who have felt at one with these formless masses, these great and monstrous forces, at a strike meeting, in a street demonstration, who will get a thrill from Romains's poems. Though commonplace, intentionally so, in rhythm and vocabulary, they make a sort of epic of modern life.

I have said that Romains is the only *Unanimiste*, but Arcos is usually classed as such, just as Vildrac and Duhamel are put together as "*Whitmanistes*." Not the god-crowd, but the birth of the god in man is Arcos's theme in "Ce qui naît." He is a "cosmic" poet, who renders the Bergsonian philosophy, especially the theory of flux and real duration, in revolutionary verse. But this sort of thing is difficult reading. Whenever I tried "Ce qui naît," even in Paris, I found myself putting on my hat and starting for the picture-shop in the rue de Seine, where I could be sure of an illuminating conversation with the truest poet of the four — Vildrac.

A poet whose personality remained so elusive, so delicate, so considerate of all one's own reticences, that even at this distance one does not dare try to give it weight and substance. I see

him always standing somewhat hesitatingly in the middle of the back gallery, or, better, in the little salon of his apartment, where Madame sewed at the table, and a quiet little boy and girl lifted round eyes from their lessons; standing, two hours on end, talking of Paul Fort, of Verhaeren, of Verlaine, of Whitman, of Wordsworth, and the other poets who bind the nations together. He had just discovered Wordsworth and consulted me about the difficult passages. That there would be instinctive understanding between the author of "Poor Susan" and "We are Seven" — the Wordsworth of the poor, the humble, and the commonplace — and the author of "Les deux buveurs," "Une Auberge," "Paysage," is obvious to anybody who knows the "Livre d'Amour" and "Découvertes." If anything remains of *Unanimisme* ten years hence, it will, I believe, be this small volume of Vildrac's poems, the New Testament of the new faith. Here genuine poetic sensibility reveals in one sharp touch of significant truth something that philosophy can only baldly state or dully reiterate. Life, as Duhamel says, has told Vildrac some secrets: the secrets are not themselves new, they are as old as Christianity; but he listens and looks naïvely. His

"Book of Love" is poignant because he dares repeat the confidence as simply as he receives it, without any moralizing or dogmatizing.

He tells us in "Commentaire" how the poet feels who, bent over his desk with pen and paper, tries to set down again the egotistic echoes of the voice that is within him — and suddenly finds that voice stifled and his mind a stagnant pool. He is tired of heroism wrought by strokes of his pen, tired of lying to his work and having his work lie to his life.

> *"Et je voudrais bien sortir de chez moi*
> *Pour faire un poème avec de mes pas,*
> *En prenant ou non ma plume à temoin;*
> *En prenant ou non les gens à temoin;*
> *Et je voudrais bien . . ."* [1]

When he gets out into the world, what does he find? Two old men drinking in a tavern, two quarrelsome old men who for one moment are happy in a glass of comradeship; a miserable inn at the crossroads where a child reveals the meaning of pitying love to a wanderer; a poor woman wheeling her baby along the road in the spring; a piece of land near a factory covered with the ugly

[1] And I should like to go out from my house to make a poem of my footsteps, taking my pen to witness or not; taking other people into my confidence, or not, and I should like . . .

refuse of industrialism, where a little green grass is growing.

"Mais si l'on avait assez d'amour" —

we must have enough love and imagination to realize what these trivial meetings, these mean and squalid sights reveal. Wherever the poet does perceive what life, in its depth, has to say, he is exalted by his identification with a larger world: —

"Il y avait moi, parmi tout cela,
Un peu celui-ci, un peu celui-là —
Il y avait moi.
Le rêve tendu désespérement vers des archipels
Et vers telle vie.
Une vie dans le vent, toutes voiles dehors,
Chair, esprit et le cœur et les yeux — extase ou larmes —
Ou, oui, furieusement, toutes voiles dehors:
Une vie sans rien de commun avec la mort." [1]

The last poem in the book, "Le Conquérant," is a vision of the marvellous new joy that comes from brotherhood. The conqueror walks through the world, by his transfigured presence converting the population and spreading his great news;

[1] There was I in the midst of all this, a little this one, a little that one — there was I with my dreams desperately seeking the archipelagos, seeking this or that life. Life in the wind with all sails set, body, spirit, and heart and eyes — ectasy or tears — oh, yes, all sails furiously set: a life which has nothing in common with death.

"and the time came in the country when there was nothing to fill the pages of history but songs in unison, dances in common, combats and victory."

> "Poets to come! Orators, singers, musicians to come!
> Not to-day is to justify me and answer what I am for,
> But you, a new brood, native, athletic, continental,
> Greater than before known,
> Arouse, for you must justify me."

These lines of Whitman's come near to expressing the *Unanimiste's* feeling about himself. "Greater than before known? " — he would hardly make this claim, yet it may be well for me, who am his advocate, to open the thick history of contemporary French literature that lies on my table. As I glance through the index I find that this poetic alliance is only one among innumerable others, each of which has its reviews, its followers, and its prophets: *Paroxysme; Impulsionnisme; Naturisme; Synthétisme; Intégralisme; Visionnarisme; Futurisme; Primitivisme; Sincèrisme; Intensisme; Floralisme; Simultanéisme; Dynamisme; Imperialisme* — these are a few of the classifications. I do not myself believe that *Paroxysme*, for instance, ranks with *Unanimisme*. But neither do I wish to proclaim the *Unanimistes*

as great poets. Their voices are minor in the chorus led by Verhaeren; minor, but, it seems to me, significant.

It is possible, as my traditionalist friends object, that even the sensitive and human Vildrac is a *faux naïf;* that Romains is the slave of a system; that Duhamel has the "accent of the faubourg." Perhaps these men, in their desire to throw off the past, have forgotten too much, or never learned enough of the great French tradition. Perhaps their theories of versification are unimportant. The reason I care for *Unanimisme* is that it somehow expresses, in a new way, the first thing France taught me in the early years of this century: a humanitarian hope.

.... X ....

A Modern Cœnobium

"Le résultat du travail obscur de mille paysans, serfs d'une abbaye, etait une abside gothique dans une belle vallée ombragée de hauts peupliers, où de pieuses personnes venaient, six ou huit fois par jour, chanter des psaumes à l'Eternel. Cela constituait une assez belle façon d'adorer, surtout quand, parmi les ascètes il y avait un Saint Bernard. . . . Cette vallée, ces eaux, ces arbres, ces rochers voulaient crier vers Dieu, mais n'avaient pas de voix; l'abbaye leur en donnait une." [1]

THE Abbaye I have in mind stands in the midst of a wide, cultivated plain on the borders of Champagne and Burgundy. On a morning in early September, straight from a crass German ship, from Paris languishing in summer dust and loud with American voices, I found myself entering its cool, ancient, gray-walled garden, where two or three gentlemen in shabby black

[1] "The result of the obscure labor of a thousand peasants, serfs of an abbey, was a Gothic apse in a beautiful valley shaded by tall poplars, where pious folk came six or eight times a day to sing psalms to the All High. This made a sufficiently beautiful way of adoration, above all when among the ascetics there was a Saint Bernard. This valley, these waters, these trees, these rocks wished to cry to God but had no voice: the abbey gave them one." (Ernest Renan: *Dialogues philosophiques.*)

were pacing slowly between the flowery borders. France! — it made one catch one's breath, after two breathless American years, to find her waiting here; so tranquilly, so soberly, so articulately waiting to initiate one into her intellectual conflicts and her spiritual hopes.

My host, as he advanced to meet me, raising his hat high from the bald dome of his head, knew how to make his salutation a part of the picture. I still see him standing there against the colossal wall of the twelfth-century grange above which loomed the greater height of the noble Cistercian church. The long, sloping roof of the grange, tiled, mossed, mellowed, where doves gently moaned and spread their wings in the sun, added, as the bright flower-beds did, an intimate note of peace and amenity to the naked asceticism of the monastic background. It was Sunday morning, I remember, and one heard the organ of the church rolling somnolently under the vault. Mme. Paul Desjardins, my hostess, was at mass with her children and some of her guests. Out here, pacing the sunny greensward, were her husband, a free-thinking professor, who has had a strong influence on the intellectual youth of France; M. Alfred Loisy, the excommunicated

Catholic modernist, now Professor of Comparative Religion at the Collège de France; M. Paul Sabatier, the Protestant Franciscan. How right M. Desjardins had been to save this antique retreat of faith and pure reason from the destruction that followed the "Separation," and consecrate it to the uses of modern seekers after truth.

"*Pons exulis, hortus, asylum,*" says an inscription of 1250. This was ever the great tradition of the Abbaye de Pontigny, as M. Desjardins, in his admirable pamphlet setting forth the purpose of the *Entretiens d'été*, reminds those who would share its twentieth-century hospitality. Established in the twelfth century by monks of the original Cistercian foundation of Cîteaux, and bearing on its architecture the austere and logical imprint of St. Bernard's reforming mind, it was even in the Middle Ages a refuge for foreigners as well as for Frenchmen. Thomas à Becket sojourned here, and other illustrious archbishops of Canterbury, who knew the persecutions of the English kings. The last of them, Edmund of Abingdon, dying here, became the patron of the church. As Morton Fullerton, a modern pilgrim, remarks, at Pontigny, one may look back to the distant age when there were no walls between

the nations. "The unity," he adds, "which the Catholicism of the Middle Ages knew how to create above the rivalries of the peoples, science may one day bring back again into the world."

Here was M. Desjardins's text and his opportunity: an international unity of thought has been one of his dearest dreams. His is a unique figure, a genius preëminently social, even in the French nation. The best of his years and of his culture and learning and intelligence have gone into — talk. Talk not casual, but directed to the formation of an enlightened public opinion. A professor and a scholar of distinction, he is still better known as the leader of a society which gained its weight at the time of the Dreyfus Affair; a society called "L'Union pour la vérité," whose chief object is to aid its members "to form just judgments" by means of the critical and liberal discipline of free discussion. What more natural, then, from the moment when he came into possession of the Abbaye than to think of re-creating there in the vacation season "a free and tranquil group of friends, a modern *cœnobium*," which should also in some measure be a *foyer international*. The place was too monumental for the use of a single man or family.

"The vastness and the arrangement of the edifice invited the collective life, imposed it almost. What was the use of all these individual, separate cells, and these vast corridors of stone, where the morning and the evening sun played under the vaults? The simplicity of the Romanesque architecture and the silence indicated in addition that the collective life should be contained, inward." So the *Entretiens d'été* were begun, bringing together for ten days at a time, in a setting hallowed by the past, men and women representing many shades and generations of French intellectual thought, and a few privileged foreigners.

Nothing more different from the thin educational atmosphere of the usual "summer meeting" can well be imagined. Richness was here the quality in which one was steeped. The occasion was like a glorified, intellectual house-party, where one was free from social and other bondage, and where the feast of reason did not consist merely of caviare and cocktails partaken at odd hours, but was a solid repast composed with true French art, and washed down with mellow wine. Thanks to the understanding skill of the host and hostess, the guests lived quite after their own fashion during the day, meeting their fellows,

of course, for meals, but not gathering all together for the *entretien* until that really sociable hour between tea and dinner when shadows lengthen and minds begin to stir.

Before that hour, on the Sunday of my arrival, I had time, with a sense of home-coming — this was my second visit to Pontigny — just sufficiently stirred by novelty, to take account of my surroundings and my companions. My hostess, as she showed me to my "cell," made light of my quite legitimate fears that I had nothing to contribute to the philosophical discussion. Mme. Desjardins made light of everything: that, I reflected, as I watched her slim, trim, swift-moving figure vanish again down the corridor, was her extraordinary gift, the gift of the Frenchwoman at her highest and most civilized level. Everything I was to enjoy in the next ten days bore the stamp of Madame's clever, active hands, her clear, constructive, practical mind, from the embroidered homespun on my dressing-table to the orchards and fields cut by the little willow-fringed river Serein that lay below my windows.

The fields which she turned to such excellent agricultural account stretched beyond the walled

enclosure. The immediate foreground of my view was a sleepy square of green turf enclosed between an angle of gray stone and buttressed roof made by the junction of the rear wall of the grange with the side wall of the church. Here the French Revolutionists, who destroyed most of the Abbey buildings, had had the grace to leave one gallery of the cloister untouched for modern eyes. And here on the green the Desjardins children had set up their tennis-net; Blaise, the roly-poly ten-year-old; Anne, two years his senior, with her tangle of flopping curls and her inherited gift of witty speech; Michel, the intellectual of fifteen — there they were now, finishing a game with an elderly young man whom I did n't know, waving their rackets, and signaling that it was lunch-time.

Across the long tables in the fine Romanesque refectory the eyes of all the guests kept turning to our hostess. How in the world did she do it? To lead a normal private life with her husband and children — lessons, music-lessons, nothing forgotten — in the midst of so much society; to manage the farm and garden at a profit; to run the big, complicated household like clock-work, and feed us so royally in a country where food was

hard to get; to contribute just the right and pertinent word at just the right moment to the heat of discussion, and all with the air of a lady who had nothing to do but "sew a fine seam" — it was *épatant*, it was beautiful. Silhouetted against the whitewashed wall her narrow, dark, distinguished head was a subject for a great painter: perfectly black shining hair done high and tight in a psyche knot; narrow, high, bright cheeks, very arched black eyebrows which lifted higher still with the happy expressiveness of smile or query.

Ladies, as I looked about me, appeared to be somewhat in the majority, as the other sex had been at the sociological *décade* two years earlier. Women, M. Desjardins suggested, seek more than men the consolations of philosophy. In any case the subject of our discussion: rationalist criticism of mysticism, mystical criticism of rationalism, had drawn them hither. There was the exquisite and worldly Mme. R., a perfect replica of an eighteenth-century *grande dame*, who accompanied a bluff, elderly, business husband; there was Mlle. C., her clever friend, who wrote and lectured; there was Miss T., the English psychologist, and Mlle. R., the French one,

with her heavy black eyeglass cord; there were also, since members of the profession were especially welcome, a sprinkling of middle-aged spinster teachers and able young women (pupils of M. Desjardins) fresh from Sèvres. Yet undoubtedly these ladies, in their abundant variety, came to less than MM. Loisy, Sabatier, and Desjardins and the little group of writers, professors, and brilliant youths, who backed them up. One of the greatest differences between France and America is that in France women, even the clever ones, do the listening when men are on hand.

M. Desjardins was the person to whom everybody wanted to listen. Thanks to his wife's competent building of the foundations of the *décade*, he had nothing to bother about but the superstructure, the amiable diversions, the fine blossoming ideas. He had established his library at one end of the great upper hall of the grange, and there he made us free to work or read during the day. But his thickset yet graceful figure was often to be met in the center of a little group in the garden alleys; or conducting a party down the chill, blanched nave of the church. The light that fell undimmed through the gray-green glass of

the lancet windows here cast no spell upon the senses. Indeed, even the foreigner scarcely needed to be told that he was in this abbey church in the presence of the greatest French tradition: the tradition of clarity, simplicity, unity, "pure reason." "It accords five centuries earlier, with the 'Logic' of Port-Royal," M. Desjardins has said. Is not Pascal the French Catholic mystic whom the Anglo-Saxon Puritan can best understand? Certainly, at Pontigny, Puritans found themselves strangely at home. When, in the course of the *décade*, we visited the churches of Auxerre and Vézelay, their ripe, their almost rakish decoration seemed by comparison with this serene austerity, to symbolize the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Again, on the long, slow, conversational walks which our host led along the flat red roads and across the rolling stubble-fields, the impression of what the "Cenobites" who built our Abbey had sacrificed of pride and vain-glory was borne in upon us. It was impossible to get away from the church; its long gray outline loomed ever behind, before us under the low-hanging sky. And yet it fitted into these unemphasized rustic contours of the land, which are so different from the

picturesque *coteaux* of southern Burgundy, as humbly as some great, gray farm building — Walter Pater had remarked it in his day, but one inevitably repeated the discovery. The stern, round arches, the coif-like apse hugged the sweep of the nourishing earth, hid themselves in the furrow.

Our minglings of archæology with international politics brought us back from our walk in a sort of sublimated state, over a plain bathed in a diffused, transfiguring golden light, which was probably as much the light of the French intelligence as the light of the declining sun. In any case, we fairly floated along, traversing our village, which, like the others of the region, seemed to be constructed of gray stone pillaged from the Abbaye in 1789 — passing under the dainty little eighteenth-century *pavillon* built by the last worldly abbots for the entertainment of their lady guests, and so into the garden, where Madame was, of course, established with her children, her embroidery frame, and her groaning tea-table.

After tea came the real business of the day, the *entretien*. Even this was not a formal affair. Indeed, it always had an air of conversational freedom, and yet, because of M. Desjardins's skill as conductor, always reached a goal. Witty,

searching, epigrammatic, with an inexhaustible mine of learning and culture to draw on, and an extraordinary range of allusion, he seemed actually to be as much *littérateur* as philosopher, as much philosopher as sociologist — one might, paradoxical though it seems, continue the list through the range of human knowledge, without branding him a dilettante. How did such a thorough-going radical manage to keep all tradition in his pocket? It was the play of his curious, critical mind and still more his gift of style in speech which most dazzled the Anglo-Saxon. Thinking, with M. Desjardins, was a social act. "*Il cherche toujours sa pensée à travers la pensée des autres*," said one of the ladies. He had a habit, when he spoke, of claiming, with his roving, deep-set, brilliant brown eyes, the approval and recognition of an audience. He was often vague and *distrait* in private conversation, but put him in the midst of a group and his intellect was hard and crystalline, refracting every sympathetic gleam, utilizing every opening, drawing blood, stimulating controversy, and always forging ahead. At the end of two hours, however much the talk had seemed to wander, however empirical it appeared to the pragmatic American,

there was something *constructed*, which made, in turn, a starting-point for to-morrow's *entretien*.

What, then, did we discover about the relations between rationalism and mysticism? It is not easy to say: many personal definitions and hypotheses were offered, and Bergson, Durkheim, and the other modern French philosophers and their intellectualist critics were abundantly cited. But what remains with me as most significant is the contribution of M. Loisy, the distinguished modernist writer, who took the floor on several successive days to give us the result — not then published — of his researches into the origin of the Christian mystery.

The transmission of religious thought and emotion, and also the transmission of the forms which are the vehicle of that thought; the infiltration into primitive Jewish thought of ancient Orphic religions and mysteries; the evolution of the idea of a community, of a church — all this would have been fascinating to the layman, even if it had not been spoken by a *grand excommunié* in a laicized abbey. As it was, this gentle, blue-eyed, retiring old man, whose gray beard and neat, dark-blue clothes were unconsciously belied by his ecclesiastical tones and gestures, and whose

spirit of *douce moquerie* was occasionally betrayed by an instinctive piety, became a poignant figure for us, in one of the most poignant of modern French dramas. How could the Church have let such a mind go? Yet how could she keep him, who dissected her with his finely tempered critical instrument as a surgeon might dissect his own mother, absorbed, in spite of an old affection, in the strangeness of her anatomy.

The drama was further enhanced by the presence of a young disciple whom this critical influence had also detached from the ancient mother, and who evidently yet kept for her an even greater love. C.'s youth was not to be gathered from his pale, lined hatchet face — a face that summed up the wisdom and suffering and humor of the ages, and sat oddly atop his undergrown child's body. I could too readily imagine, as I watched him, the stare his bald head and lean shanks, below their knee-breeches, his soft, black tie and his shrill, breaking voice would have won him from a Harvard student of the same age. But if the Harvard student had listened, his scorn would have turned to marvel that under-nourishment and midnight oil, combined with intellectual passion, could produce

such a rare gift of expressive speech, such mastery of background, such ease of demonstration.

C.'s subject was the liturgy; he had won the *Prix de Rome* and was soon departing for three years to the Farnese Palace. Meanwhile, already a *savant*, but still, as it were, at his master's feet, he had occasion, in the course of the argument, to supply liturgical illustration. It was then, as he chanted in his high quaver, that one realized the intensity of his emotion about what he had renounced; it was then that the face of the old man, who leaned forward so eagerly and followed with uplifted hand, seemed to sum up the whole problem of the rationalist. His approving, unconscious, "*Oui, mon fils*," his warning "*C'est trop dire, mon fils*," were strangely touching. The understanding between youth and age is for foreigners one of the most moving and enviable facts of French civilization; age, in its gentle, ironic detachment making no claims but those of disinterested sympathy in an absorbing spectacle; youth, largely because left so unconstrained, spontaneously revering.

Another pretty example of the interplay of generations was given by C.'s relation to the Desjardins children. They adored him, frankly and

freely, hung on his arm, drank up his words, while he, with his face of ancient wisdom, entered comically into their secrets, their mischief, and their games. Michel, already a serious student, consulted him about his intellectual problems, and Anne adopted him as a literary critic. Anne was cultivating a *grande passion* for the eighteenth-century beauty; but her sonnets did not, as her carping elder brother pointed out, meet the rigid demands of French metrics. "*Toi et C.*," she turned on them one evening furiously, "*vous ne comprenez rien à l'amour.*" The salon was convulsed.

This smooth-flowing current of happy family life, in which we all bathed more or less, brought real refreshment to the atmosphere. In England, at such a gathering, children would have been kept well out of sight. In America they would have been either bored or boring. But here at Pontigny — in a land, that is to say, where the "family" is at the bottom of everything — they fitted naturally into the scheme of things. To hear Blaise — who had engaged one of the "Sévriennes" in a game of "*la famille Gringoire*" — asking in a whisper for "the notary's cat"; to watch Anne learning a new stitch at her mother's side, did not detract from the dramatic readings,

or the music, or the renewed intellectual arguments with which our evenings were beguiled.

Into these discussions there entered much more than I have been able to suggest. The flavor of past *décades* was pervasive. With our excursion to Vézelay, for instance, were associated not only the archæological reminiscences of an old workman of Viollet de Duc's who guards the lovely church, but a precious fragment of folk-lore that M. Bedier (a recent guest) had discovered on a certain lone hill. We heard, moreover, what the *Nouvelle Revue Française* had contributed in the way of literary debate; what the ardent representatives of various oppressed peoples — Indians, Poles, Finns, Alsace-Lorrainers — had evolved as to the rights of small nations; what the educationalists were planning in the line of a modern model school. And behind, like a sort of humane medium in which the most disparate elements merged and blent, was — France. First the wide countryside, so primitive yet so civilized, with its hard, straight roads, its pale skies, its forested horizons, its gray villages, its willowy streams, its broad, homely fields, its ancient, loquacious farmers — the France of the soil. Next, the Abbaye, austere and monumental, with its

memories of monks and crusaders, of kings and pilgrims, of prelates and revolutionists — symbol of the conflict between faith and reason, the France which is the inheritance of the *intellectuel.*

"*Pristina nec periit pietas* — may its ancient piety abide," ends the modern inscription outside the refectory door. Well, the Abbaye was still a pious spot, besides being a hospitable and generous one, so the most rationalistic of the guests must have said to himself as he took the train, and wandered off toward Paris, along the silvery reaches of the river Yonne. Was he nearer a vision of "truth" than the earnest Cenobite of the twelfth century? After all, he too — in spite of all that the intervening years had added to human knowledge — yes, he too, for all his learning and his scepticism, had to admit in leaving Pontigny the eternal verity which Pascal has stated once for all: "*Le cœur a des raisons que la raison ne connaît point.*"

···· XI ····

Signs of the Times

The returning American is always deeply impressed by the inviolability of French family life. I remember being especially conscious of this quality the first evening I spent in Mme. Langeais's lamplit salon after my arrival from England. I remember realizing afresh, as I looked from one generation to another, — there were three, and how different, gathered about the table, — that no foreigner could so much as blunt the edges of a French household's essential integrity.

The precious center of our circle was a very, very old lady, some ninety-odd, indeed, whose beaked, fairy-godmother face, with its witty, fine-drawn wrinkles, scarcely reached the top of her stuffed chair-back. Opposite her sat her daughter, my hostess, who wears a distinguished name with a most distinguished grace. Then, each in her appointed place, fixed for the winter like stars in their orbits, Colette, the vigorous, dark daughter of the house, just on the edge of

twenty-one; a plain, elderly governess; a young American or two. *Le Temps* was neatly folded in front of Madame, and at her mother's elbow lay the *Revue,* — the salmon-colored one, I need hardly say, — but the ladies' hands were all engaged in some intricate needlework or lace-making. What reading was done in this salon had to be accomplished *sans en avoir l'air*, since a salon is a place where one converses.

The curtains toward the garden were drawn, every door was hermetically closed, the fire glowed red: in short, that atmosphere of polished domesticity known only to the upper bourgeoisie of France brooded over us, steeped us in peace. Conversation was quiet and discreet. Grand'-mère's *mots* on the subject of the latest play or novel, keyed so as to reach only the more sophisticated ears, dropped like diamonds into still water. Madame's needle moved silently in and out. Until the *valet de chambre* came in, at exactly ten o'clock, with the tray of camomile and pink *sirop*, nothing, I said to myself, not even a telephone call, could break the spell of our perfect serenity.

But suddenly, all traditions to the contrary, the door burst open, and noisily. One of the old family servants thrust in a head swathed in a

black knit shawl, and in accents which she made no attempt to modulate called, "Quick, Mlle. Colette, *la retraite!*"

At the words Colette leaped to her feet, and tore out of the room without the usual questioning look to her mother, with no apology to her grandmother. Young America and the governess followed suit, and when I looked for my hostess, she too had vanished — Grand'mère and I were alone with the echo of retreating footsteps and the trail of scattered silk.

The grandmother's face — it was strange, considering her impatience of breaks in the established order — expressed no commentary. Her veined old hands continued to weave the filet border of the dining-room tablecloth, and I was free to go, or stay. So I stayed; for this old woman has a gift which even in France grows rare: that of making the seat next hers the warmest, the brightest, the most interesting, the most enviable spot in the world; the gift of bringing all life, like so much treasure-trove, into the circle of her lamp.

"*La retraite aux flambeaux*": the word of explanation came casually at last, but a little hovering smile rewarded me for my patience. After

some years of Socialist quietus, military demonstrations — like the evening return of the soldiers to barracks with torches and brass bands — were again permitted in the street. Colette, said Grand'mère, had a weakness for soldiers. Her great-grandchildren likewise, the son and daughter of Colette's eldest sister.

I exclaimed incredulously, for their father had been one of the best-known "*Tolstoïsants*" of France.

"Yes," said Grand'mère. "If those children are in a 'bus and see soldiers passing, nothing will do but they must descend and stand on the sidewalk singing the 'Marseillaise.' A generation of young patriots!" She spoke lightly, as always, but as the family continued to remain absent, her impatience grew. *Enfin*, this was no way to spend an evening. She dropped her needle and tapped the cane that rested against her knee.

"For my part," she said at last, on an impulse of *sympathie* which our lamplit solitude intensified, "I pray" — and her face contracted and her hand tightened on the handle of her cane — "that I may never see another war. It is enough to carry the memory of two revolutions to one's grave." She was a girl of eighteen in 1848, she

told me, and remembered as if it were yesterday the terror she felt for her father and brothers and — well — for another young man.

"I had already a certain sentiment for the man who was to become my husband," she explained, with a tender little laugh, "and when his mother described to me how he had come back to her, his face black with powder, his cockade shot clean off — yes, that settled it. His cap without a cockade — how I treasured it! I have it still."

During the siege of Paris, in 1870, she continued, thoroughly enjoying her reminiscences at last, her family had not suffered. They were well-to-do, and there was wood to burn, though most of it was gilded. Life went on normally — schools, even theaters — while the shells exploded in the street. Worse than German shells was the sense of moral gunpowder within the walls. On one occasion, when peaceful demonstrators were shot down by the Communards in the place Vendôme, she and her daughter had gone out to look for her son, then a boy of seventeen — "*Te rappelles-tu?*" she asked Mme. Langeais, who had now returned to her chair. My hostess shook her head, her eyes fixed on her work; then, sharply, in a voice I had never heard, —

"*Je t'en prie* — I beg you not to continue this conversation. *J'ai horreur de ces souvenirs-là*," — I can't endure those memories, — she exclaimed, as Colette, who had known no wars, reappeared, followed by her glowing train. It had been a splendid *retraite* — they'd followed for blocks and blocks!

"A little music," suggested Grand'mère, looking with disapproval at the excited red cheeks. "A sonata of Mozart's?"

"Grand'mère! Mozart to-night? *Allons, les enfants, un petit air patriotique.*" She sat down at the piano and struck up a song by Botrel, that popular *chansonnier*, whom her grandmother considered "of a banality," and then with a mischievous smile passed to an old favorite which no Frenchwoman can resist, "*En passant par la Lorraine*": —

This first blare of trumpets was vastly surprising. A military evening in a university family! My thoughts went back to my first winter in Paris when the daughters of professors were coming back from their lectures at the Sorbonne burning with humanitarian ardor. It was "L'Internationale" they hummed in those days; they bought the Socialistic *l'Humanité*, to the distress of their mothers, and Jaurès was their oracle.

Colette, whose oracle was M. de Mun in the Catholic *Petit Parisien*, had no less generosity, no less enthusiasm, but it was turned in another direction. Though her father, a great French scholar of the generation of Taine and Renan, had been a protagonist of Dreyfus, one of those who put the larger sense of justice before the narrow

sense of *patrie*, she had absorbed nationalism, not internationalism, with her history and philosophy, ten years after his death. She had passed her baccalaureate brilliantly, and, as became his daughter, had begun to prepare her *licence*. Yet this year — here was another sign of the times — she had given up lectures in order to "do her Red Cross."

Early in the dark winter morning she started for her distant hospital, and sometimes did not get back to lunch. When this happened, her grandmother was all in a flutter. She had resigned herself with difficulty to an age which permitted girls to go out alone. In her day one brought up the *jeune fille* to be pretty and charming and intelligent, and it was compromising, even in your mother's company, to post a letter in a box. Lectures she did approve of, but for a clever girl to study nursing! — Colette admitted that she herself was not so keen for nursing. She missed the Sorbonne, and neglected her music — *mais enfin!*

"*Enfin*, one must follow the fashion," said Grand'mère wickedly, "whatever happens to Mozart."

But Mme. Langeais spoke out very decidedly

in favor of the Red Cross training. It would be useful in their Norman village, where the peasants needed education in matters of diet and hygiene.

"Yes," agreed Colette, "and" — her eyes meeting the fine, resolute elder ones — "in case of war I shall be at the service of the State."

In spite of all this, I was scarcely prepared for the accent with which the word "*Prussien*" fell from the lips of the humanitarian son-in-law when he came to dinner with his wife and his elder son. The hiss of those sibilant *ss*'s was unmistakable. Behind that bald, intellectual brow, in those deep-set idealist's eyes the possibility of a conflict was flickering as it had certainly not been two years before. War was a stupid and barbarous device, said the professor, but there were worse things than being shot for your country. It was a relief to feel, as every one did feel since the *coup d'Agadir*, that in case of need even the Socialists would march. A crisis would let loose a flood of patriotism which would carry before it all the miserable conflicts of the political arena. As to the proposed law for three years' military service, the necessity was lamentable: but what else was there to do?

"*Il faut se défendre*," said Mme. Langeais dryly.

"Exactly." The Germans had showed their hand in Morocco. Their purpose was to crush France. So long as they continued to increase armaments France must logically reply. Yes, there was no doubt of it — the pacifist professor had gone over to the side of the young patriots.

That evening in the salon was curiously different from usual, though the professor's wife, the elder representative of the third generation, sitting down with her Irish crochet, between her grandmother and her mother, fitted like a beautiful link into the chain. Her smile, the turn of her head, her quick, keen phrase, her competent activity, were obviously moulded by the same long, solid, distinguished past, and marriage had only defined, completed her rôle and her place in the world. As with all married women in France, that place might almost be expressed by a scientific formula. Now that she was present, Colette, who was still, in spite of her positive reactions, the nebulous *jeune fille*, retreated, so to speak, to join the fourth generation in the person of her nephew Jacques, a boy of fifteen, with whom she had the closest relation. In favor of the bond between them, the salon was enlarged

to include a corner of the *salle-à-manger*, where their two narrow, dark heads were visible, bent eagerly over the same newspaper. Was this why the spirits of the company seemed no longer centered in the lamplit circle?

"What is your absorbing sheet, Colette?" I inquired at last, looking for another sign of the times.

"Mademoiselle, I am afraid it is not very literary, Jacques's favorite newspaper: *l'Aéro!* We are trying to find the record of my brother Jean's new hydro."

"And," added Jacques, raising a voice already marked by professorial precision so as to reach the ears of his father, "computing the chances for Carpentier."

"Carpentier!" Up went the paternal hands to the paternal ears in the expected despairing gesture. The professor had not yet reached the point of accepting a champion prize-fighter as the hero of intellectual youth.

One would not have supposed to look at him that there was an ounce of athleticism in Jacques's composition. His slight frame, his pipestem legs, his frail arms, and, most of all, his pale, clever, concentrated face, marked him as

the studious descendant of a race of scholars. He was to be an historian, and already, though he was still in short trousers, the subject of his doctor's thesis had been chosen. His great-grandmother loved to tell, as an index of his native bent, how, at the age of four, he had burst into tears "*chez* Buffalo" at the sight of an Indian dragging a white man at his saddle-bow. "*Maman, ça me rappelle trop la mort d'Hector*" — it reminds me too much of the death of Hector. Yet here was Jacques a passionate advocate of sport. He played tennis in a determined effort to develop muscle, and got up at six in the morning to hear the result of Carpentier's boxing-matches.

Colette urged him on. Jacques was only following the normal movement of the age. She told me about one of his comrades, the son of a famous professor at the Sorbonne, who had been forbidden in childhood to read any "work of imagination," and had been nourished on the "History of France" in thirty-four volumes, — well this lad was now reading "Nick Carter" and "Arsène Lupin" in his father's study and determined to be an aviator. Carpentier, Colette assured us, was the chief subject of conversation at balls. Her grandmother, who made a great *fête* of the

evenings when her darling started off in a simple white frock by the side of her beautiful mother, just as the camomile came in, became very irate on this subject.

"I assure you, Grand'mère, a girl who is not up on boxing has no chance of partners, like the girl who speaks no slang."

Slang! Where, asked Grand'mère, was elegance, where was delicacy, where was the rare French art of conversation, if girls — was n't it women who set all standards? — used words like *embêtant* to their partners?

"*Embêtant* — *embêtant* is nothing," maintained Colette stoutly. "The Academy will accept it in a few years — has n't it just accepted *épater?* Do you want them, Grand'mère, to call me a prude? Do you want them to say I 'talk like a book'?"

Her grandmother thought that a girl brought up under the shadow of the Collège de France might well be proud to talk like a book; but Colette stood firm. Slang, I gathered, was a sort of symbol; the symbol of a generation that wished to proclaim itself active, unintellectual, not too refined for the rough things of the world; ready for — well, for whatever came.

Colette's literary taste was, of course, impeccable, and, as I discovered when I went with her to the Théâtre Français, almost wholly classical in bias. Not that she followed the modern traditionalist revival so far as to condemn all the Romantics. On the contrary, she adored the *panache* of "Hernani" and could declaim "l'Aiglon" and "Cyrano" from one end to the other. But she was ten years too young for what is still called the "revolutionary" *vers libre*. She said modestly that it was probably her fault that she could not enjoy these poets, of whom her brother-in-law thought so highly, but what could she do? She had the alexandrine *trop dans le sang*. In fiction her tastes were similarly traditionalist. "Jean-Christophe," which her mother loved, to her taste seemed shapeless and muddled. Moreover, the German hero was a little too sympathetically portrayed. Her favorite modern novels were "Colette Baudoche" and "Au Service de l'Allemagne" where Barrès, in a form that the classics themselves might envy, has restated the conflict between German "barbarism" and French "civilization," and sharpened in the breast of youth the old wound of Alsace-Lorraine.

In a family of this sort, republican, intellec-

tual, and though Catholic by no means clerical, the vulgar sort of patriotism was unthinkable. The family tradition of broad, sober, disciplined culture was all against melodrama, against sentimentality, against any sort of emotional emphasis. Mme. Langeais liked to tell, for the benefit of young America, the story of an elderly count who, when his son kissed before the company the bride whom he brought for the first time to the family lunch-table, said in cold reproof: "My son, I beg you to come down tomorrow *tout embrassés*" — already kissed. Public demonstrations in this household also were discouraged, and I remember as almost unique Colette's loud cry of joy when she read in the newspaper on New Year's Day that her brother Jean had been "decorated."

M. Jean was an inventor and manufacturer of aeroplanes. He was handsome and barely thirty, and his air of reserve and distinction was completely destructive to the hearts of young America. He had a slim, adoring, young wife, as tall and dark and mysterious as he was tall and clear-cut and fair, and the nights when "*les* Jean" came to dinner were gala occasions. The young wife had only three or four years ago sewed the

sails of the first little miniature aeroplane that Jean designed. It was in the Normandy château, and the whole family — Grand'mère's talent for anecdote made the picture lively — had gathered anxiously under the gray walls to watch the trial. It sailed, it sailed! out of the window, over the fields, Margot and Jean tearing after like a pair of happy children. And now the army had ordered several of the latest model, and Jean had been admitted to the Legion of Honor. Colette went to the celebration at Rouen a few days later, and returned deeply thrilled. There had been a *vin d'honneur* offered by the municipality; soldiers lined up in the square; speeches by officers; and Jean was so handsome in his uniform!

"Uniform?" queried young America breathlessly.

"Certainly. Did n't you know? Jean is *officier de rêserve.*"

Officier de rêserve: how the signs multiplied. Yet the *pensionnaire,* who took note of them with a sense of impending catastrophe, was still as far as the adoring young sister from really imagining that, a year and a half later, M. Jean would be "aiding" one of the great generals, through the battle of the Marne.

The Merciers in Topsbridge

THIS is a bad summer for lovers of France. Watching her trial from across the Atlantic has to me seemed like watching a sick bed from a distance: the less I could do to help, the more I magnified the suffering and the symptoms. But thanks to a French bourgeois family, whom the war has marooned in Topsbridge, I have recovered my sense of proportion.

The Merciers are not plain bourgeois. They are bourgeois-bohemian, a species that looks very queer in New England, or any other Anglo-Saxon portion of our country. It is alien even in New York. M. Mercier is a musician, a 'cellist of international reputation, and you at once perceive in him the artist's passion and zest for life. His face, heavy and plebeian in outline, fairly flickers with humor: a spicy Rabelaisian humor, emphasized by a brush of tawny hair and a pair of startling bronze mustaches. Yet the most solid, and rural, and domestic, and endearing of the French bourgeois virtues stand out all over his protuber-

ant person. He is built on a large plan, and when I meet him walking on our country roads, between Madame, his equally monumental wife, and Mademoiselle his daughter, it is literally impossible to believe in shells that fall like express trains into ancient Gothic towns; in heart-broken women dragging back from concentration camps with newborn babies wrapped in newspaper in their arms. This genial family group suggests the lesser cafés of the boulevards, the Concert Touche, the Bois on a Sunday. It suggests a little rose-arbor where, after a day spent in digging his ancestral acres, in counting the apples on the trees, and the bunches of grapes on the vines, a man may sit in his shirt-sleeves in the midst of his embroidering and admiring women-folk, drink *sirop* and contemplate the borders.

The country estate, where Mercier is accustomed to hasten every June to forget the trials of the American musical season, is now within five miles of the firing-line. The high, slate-roofed villa, the bees, the hens, the *potager*, the box-hedges, the autographed photographs of famous composers, the bound volumes of the classics, the linen sheets, and the carved walnut *armoires* that contain them, the trousseau of Mlle. Jeannette —

two dozen of everything recently made and stored in the same cupboards — all these treasures may any day be plundered, trampled, battered into nothingness. Yet the French power of accepting the irrevocable is such that the Merciers do not behave as if Topsbridge were a place of anxious exile; never has the small white farmhouse where they have taken refuge looked so gay and so friendly as this summer.

Its minute front yard, lately a tangle of phlox and sweet-william, is planted with neat rows of lettuce and romaine. Why, asks Madame, sacrifice a good square yard of ground? I saw three hens on the doorstep the other day, enmeshed in a string bag, such a bag as all the old French peasant women, with whom one has traveled in third-class railway carriages, nurse, stuffed with similar live-stock, on their alpaca knees. These hens are now being tenderly fattened by the 'cellist in a coop built of old window screens. He has a weakness for hens, his wife tells me, but nothing in his own manner hints that these are poor pickings after the three hundred he used to feed in the Picardy dawn. Monsieur himself, in the khaki knee-breeches and coat he affects, reminds one of a Rhode Island red rooster. The very pale,

very round, very prominent blue eye he cocks at you over a long, beak-like nose confirms the illusion, and there is undoubtedly a dash of *panache* in the cockade of tawny hair. Yet Mercier is the simplest, the least self-conscious of men. When July nights grow intolerably hot, and Topsbridgites lie gasping in conventional flannels in their piazza chairs, the light of the French evening lamp reveals through the thin muslin curtains a figure in striped pajamas copying manuscript music with unabated energy. What is the country for, if not for industrious ease? This is sound bourgeois-bohemian logic, and gives a summer evening call at the Merciers the atmosphere of a Balzac novel.

Madame, though she has even more reason to find it trying, makes light of the American summer weather. "Of course we are not used," she says, "but *enfin*, I have a good cel-laire, I take my book there and spend the day." Fortunately, the cellar does not often swallow her up. She sits instead on her side porch, beside an elderly *bonne*, — who has lately been rescued from the hypothetical mercies of *les Boches*, but must on no account *faire des relations* in Topsbridge, — and salutes the passers-by with a smile through which

glides the shadow of a fascinating past. Madame fits least of this family into the New England scene. She calls up for me a most definite picture: a hard, white, straight French road, a loop of shining river, a line of sentinel poplars, a gray arched bridge, and beside it a little open-air café with green iron tables. In every such café, a year ago, sat a lady exactly like Mme. Mercier: eminently respectable, yet with a dash of the histrionic about her; superabounding, yet seductive; wearing, as she does, an enormous black hat very much aslant on coils of blue-black hair dressed with yellow combs; and always carefully balanced on the edge of her chair. In Mme. Mercier's case, it is not a glass she looks down at over a blouse all zigzags and orange buttons, but a volume of Molière. She has a pupil in the French drama.

Classes, indeed, have sprung up as naturally from the family talents as salad from the flower-beds: here is another proof that bourgeois France is still alive. Securities are insecure; *les Boches*, however mythical, are real. So M. Mercier, with his reputation and his sensitive ear, teaches harmony to the tuneless, and takes an active and paternal share in Mademoiselle's gymnastic classes as well. Mlle. Jeannette, a handsome, red-

cheeked, capable girl, whose eyes are firmly fixed on the concert stage, has brought back from Paris the latest thing in musical gymnastics. I doubt, though, if she gets as much satisfaction as her father does from watching a group of ladies in their bathing-suits spasmodically struggling for "rhythms." M. Mercier makes a gallant effort to keep his shoulders steady, sucks in his mustache, but has to bend his expressive face far over the piano to hide the wicked twinkle in his eyes.

"H'attention, hop!" cries Mademoiselle. "Now, Papa, they may do the chorus"; and the piano strikes up —

"Au clair de la lune
Mon ami Pierrot —"

To hear Mercier's happy voice rolling out the old nursery song while Warsaw is falling is the most heartening thing in the world. It seems as if little girls with bare knees and fluffy skirts must still be skipping rope in the Luxembourg Gardens, and *gamins* in black aprons buying hot, sugared *gauffres* for one sou. Mme. Mercier's brother is in the trenches, near Rheims. Several cousins have been killed, her *bonne* has lost a son. Unspeakable things happened to the women and

children half a dozen villages from theirs. But one hears nothing of atrocities. Nor does one see a sock or a bandage in their ladies' hands. Indeed, I fancy I detect a shade of veiled amusement when mornings of "relief work" are mentioned by the pupils. The Merciers have got beyond that. While we Americans invent palliatives, try even to delude ourselves into believing that the horrors of war cannot be, because they do not fit our vision of an ideal world, they are looking war full in the face. France is invaded: no fact could be more blasting. Yet why, runs the bourgeois adage, revolt against what happens in spite of you? Better accept it to-day, lest you have to do so to-morrow on less convenient terms.

The Merciers know, and so do I, when the family phalanx looms quaintly above my stone wall, that even if France were annihilated they would never become Americans. Topsbridge is only a makeshift; the State House dome is only the symbol of a livelihood. We look decidedly queerer to them than they do to us. In spite of their humanity and their sociability — and how they have brought Topsbridge together! — a barrier of perfect manners is definitely interposed between us and their vital emotions. That is the

reason they cheer me so. There is an expectancy about their philosophy, their practical competence, their good-humored physical well-being, their secret detachment, which convinces me that the cafés on the boulevards will again be full of the old life; that red-roofed country villages will again be steeped in immemorial peace; that the bourgeois-bohemian will again look lovingly out from his quiet garden on the complex, civilized pattern of rural France.

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